

Monday, September 6, 2021

RE: Students Call for Affordable, Accessible Transit in the GTHA

Dear Mayor John Tory, TTC Board Members, and Metrolinx Board Members,

Commuting to campus is a long-existing barrier for students to succeed within their education. Post-secondary students are, especially, hard-hit and forced to endure multi-hour commutes with high fares that inhibit their time spent studying and further contribute to a financial burden. COVID-19 has exacerbated these economic struggles¹ and introduced new apprehension around the safety of public transit. Therefore, students endorse the TTC Rider's report "Transform the TTC!: Pandemic Recovery Fare Policies for A Thriving Transit System". Furthermore, to overcome these realities, the Scarborough Campus Students Union, the University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union, the University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union, the Continuing Education Students' Association of X University, and the Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students collectively representing over 67,000 full-time, part-time and graduate students, are calling for affordable and accessible transit across our cities, through the following:

1. Lowering of TTC fares & introduction of single between-transit system fares for post-secondary students:

According to a comparison chart included in the TTC Riders' Report, Toronto has some of the highest transit fare rates in the country². Additionally, due to the elimination of multiple routes and ever-increasingly long wait times, PRESTO bus service users do not benefit from the two-hour fare window. Many residents would instead reduce taking transit than pay the high costs for monthly passes³.

Students commuting across boundaries into Mississauga, Brampton, York Region, or Durham are now paying two fares: one for the TTC and another for service outside of Toronto. On top of the double fares, Ontario students pay the second-highest tuition fees in the county. In striving for a sustainable future, students need to be empowered to take public transit through partnerships across transit systems that remove multi-fare barriers, including fee transfer windows between neighbouring Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) transit systems and free transfers between GO, UPX, and TTC.

Students cannot afford to be spending their limited time and money on a decreasingly valuable and increasingly costly transit system. Students from across the GTHA are asking for affordable and high-quality transit! Student unions in the National Capital Region have agreements with their local transit provider for more affordable and single between-transit system fares, even between provinces, so a precedent exists that demonstrates the feasibility of our proposal.⁴

¹ https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/caut_poll_may_2020.pdf

² http://www.ttcriders.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Report-and-Campaign-Launch_Report_Online-FINAL.pdf (pg. 15/40)

³ http://www.ttcriders.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Report-and-Campaign-Launch_Report_Online-FINAL.pdf (pg. 14/40)

⁴ <https://www.octranspo.com/en/fares/reduced-fares/u-pass/>

2. Expansion of student discounts to include part-time status students:

Despite personal situations that lead to students pursuing part-time studies, they are continually disadvantaged by exclusions from academic, financial grant programs, a requirement to make OSAP and NSLSC loan payments while studying, and exclusions from post-secondary transit fare discounts. Cities such as Los Angeles and Paris⁵ have introduced free transit for youth up to 18 years old, and the pilot program for youth in Los Angeles will include college students and low-income riders.⁶ For Toronto to stay competitive on a global scale, immediate transit investments need to be made to recognize post-secondary institutions as hubs of communities and support every student in accessing their education. At the very least, we urgently request that the TTC and Metrolinx include part-time post-secondary students in monthly Presto pass and single-fare discounts. Both TTC and Metrolinx need to solicit ongoing feedback from recognized student organizations that represent students who need public transportation to live their lives and achieve their life goals.

3. Fulfilling of promises to the Scarborough community:

Even amidst a pandemic, elected officials have demonstrated a lack of political will to prioritize the safety and accessibility of services, like public transit. Continuously, racialized and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted and neglected⁷. Public transit is not only an essential mode of transportation; it is intrinsically linked to many vital aspects of an individual's wellbeing, including health, access to food, and employment. With return-to-campus and -work measures already starting, overcrowded busses are a severe concern. Additionally, many lower-income residents, those who often live outside of the downtown core, have to travel more than a kilometre to access a supermarket⁸. Students attending rurally-situated institutions and living in residence and neighbouring rental properties share these struggles.

Therefore, with the upcoming closure of the RT, Scarborough cannot afford to wait for a subway system. The EELRT is estimated to be completed in 2030-2031, which to members at UTSC and residents in the Scarborough community, is ten years too late. Scarborough Transit planning is not just going from point A to point B. Students, residents, and community members need a holistic transit framework that improves service for all facets of life!

Across our cities, enough is enough! Public transit is a human right. Students need more public transit funding, and we need it now!

Sincerely,



⁵ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-03/why-paris-dropped-transit-fares-for-young-riders>.

⁶ <https://www.govtech.com/fs/l-a-metro-to-develop-free-transit-program-for-some-riders>.

⁷ <https://uttri.utoronto.ca/files/2020/05/Preliminary-Report-on-the-Public-Transit-and.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-56681.pdf>