

Late Night Update - January 2009

With this late night transit update, the Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton continues our campaign for 24 hour transit. Our passenger count along Whyte Avenue on New Year's Eve shows that the Route 4 bus gets significantly busier after ETS normally shuts down. Peak loads are twice as high after the bus would normally stop running as before, reach the seated capacity of the buses, and are four times the *upper* service threshold. Clearly, the demand exists from recreational users alone, but as always TRUE is most concerned with the impact on workers who are forced to spend half a shift's earnings on taxi fare – both late at night and early in the morning.

One year following Edmonton City Council's receipt of the relevant administration reports, there has been no visible movement toward extended ETS service hours, to the frustration of the thousands of supporters of our campaign. Attached to this update is the relevant section from TRUE's ETS Growth Strategy and Planning Review Shadow Report circulated in July 2008 which demonstrates the ongoing cost to transit riders of continuing to fail to provide this much needed service.

Each January we are reminded that the city has the ability to run transit later when New Year's Eve service continues until 3:30am on New Year's Day. On this single night a year, the extended late night routes are finally worthy of their name. The Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton would like thank the City and ETS administration for another successful and well-utilized year of a much-needed service. However, Edmonton deserves better.

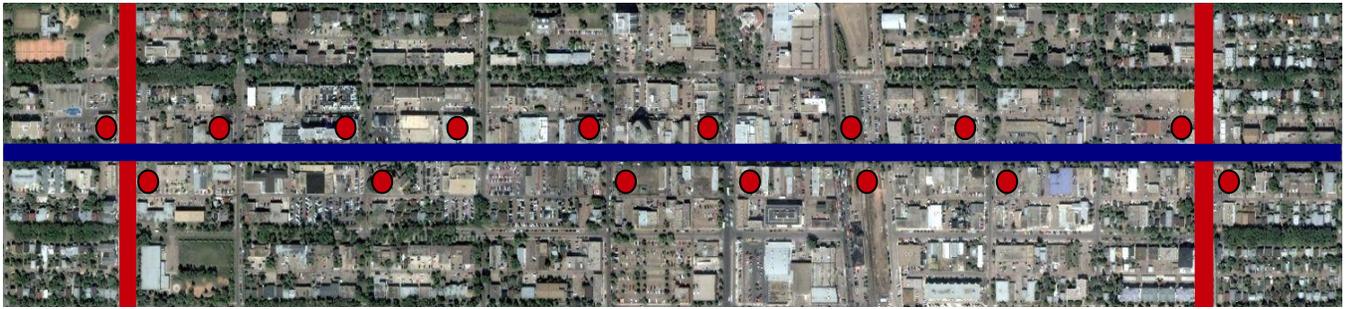
Extended ETS hours on New Year's Eve provide a glimpse of what the transit system of a dynamic and socially conscious city should look like. Buses were busy into the night with well-behaved passengers. The overall mood was celebratory, and drivers were more cheerful than would be expected, given the circumstances. While we thank all involved for another successful year of New Year's Eve service, TRUE's position continues to be that a 24 hour city requires 24 hour transit year-round.

We don't think that this is such a lofty goal. Two Canadian cities run 24 hours, and another two are only down for a couple hours a night. Edmonton, however, languishes at the bottom of the list with London, Ontario when the ten most populous metro areas in Canada are sorted by end of service. Toronto and Montreal run 24 hour service, Vancouver and Ottawa run until about 3:30am, and Calgary, Quebec City, Winnipeg, and Hamilton all run later than Edmonton.

As much as we believe in the promotion and availability of a safe ride home, this New Year's Eve-only service can't provide shift workers and those with hospitality, health care, and other jobs with a ride home every night. The burden of a nightly cab fare eats up half of a minimum wage shift's earnings, and means that many job opportunities are simply unavailable. \$30 a night is unacceptable. \$600 a month is unacceptable. One night of success is 364 too few. With that said, on to the count results.



On this past New Year's Eve, TRUE counted boardings, disembarkings, and passengers on Route 4's Whyte Avenue section in both directions between 109 Street and 99 Street from 10:30pm to 2:30am, for a total of 16 trips. Five of those trips are not ordinarily run.



Shirley Lowe, Executive Director of the Old Strathcona Business Association, surveyed four clubs and reports that New Year's Eve is equivalent to Whyte's regular busy season. As TRUE visually confirmed, the main difference is that New Year's Eve has a greatly reduced number of pedestrians and short-to-non-existent lines - as TRUE can attest, frigid temperatures made walking and waiting quite unpleasant. TRUE also notes that selecting Whyte Avenue avoids the fireworks crowds that would be seen elsewhere in the city.

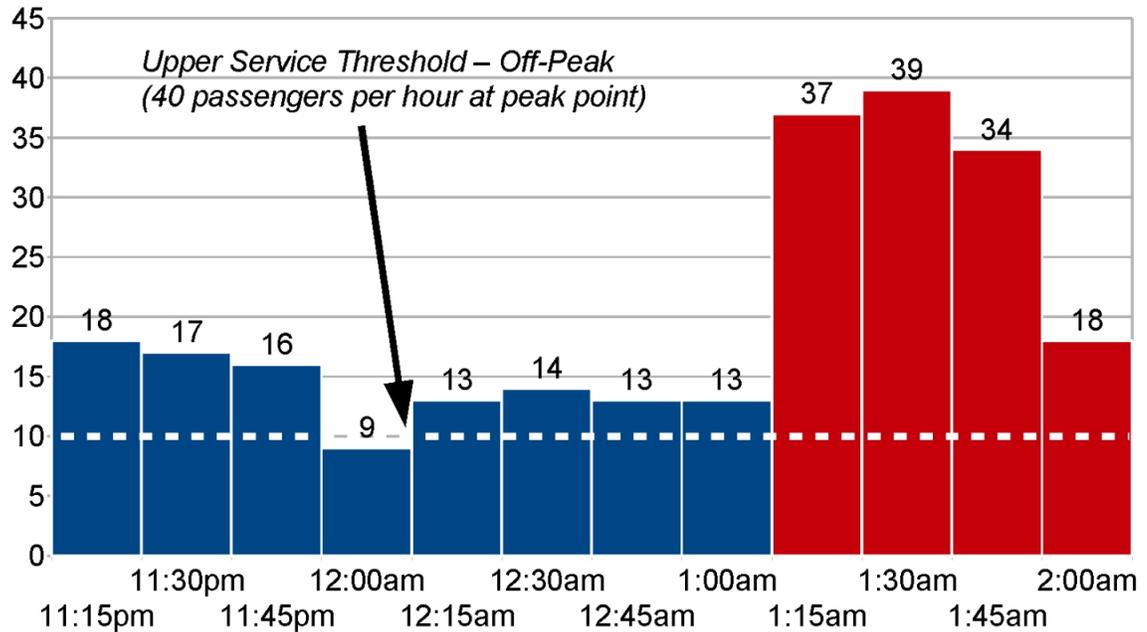
Additionally, Operation Red Nose and increased taxi and pub crawl service are unique to New Year's Eve. Patrons are also more likely to plan rides and hotel stays ahead of time. Further, there were indications the service was unexpected: buses were consistently flagged down between stops, and many passengers only made it on by running. While service was free throughout the count, many riders were confused and attempted to pay regardless. Perhaps most importantly, New Year's Eve service is of little benefit to workers, thus this count inevitably misses a key segment of riders.

With that said, the numbers. Simply put, the first graph on the next page shows the number of people on the bus (not counting ourselves) at the most crowded point of each ten-block run. The eight blue bars represent the last eight runs of a typical night, whereas the four red bars are not normally run. Four bars represent one hour, so the "Upper Off-Peak" standard of 40 passengers per hour at the peak point shows up at the 10 passenger mark. Not only is the *upper* standard exceeded by several times, but the peak arrives just after ETS normally packs it in for the night. This is of no great surprise, since everyone is turned loose around 2:00am.

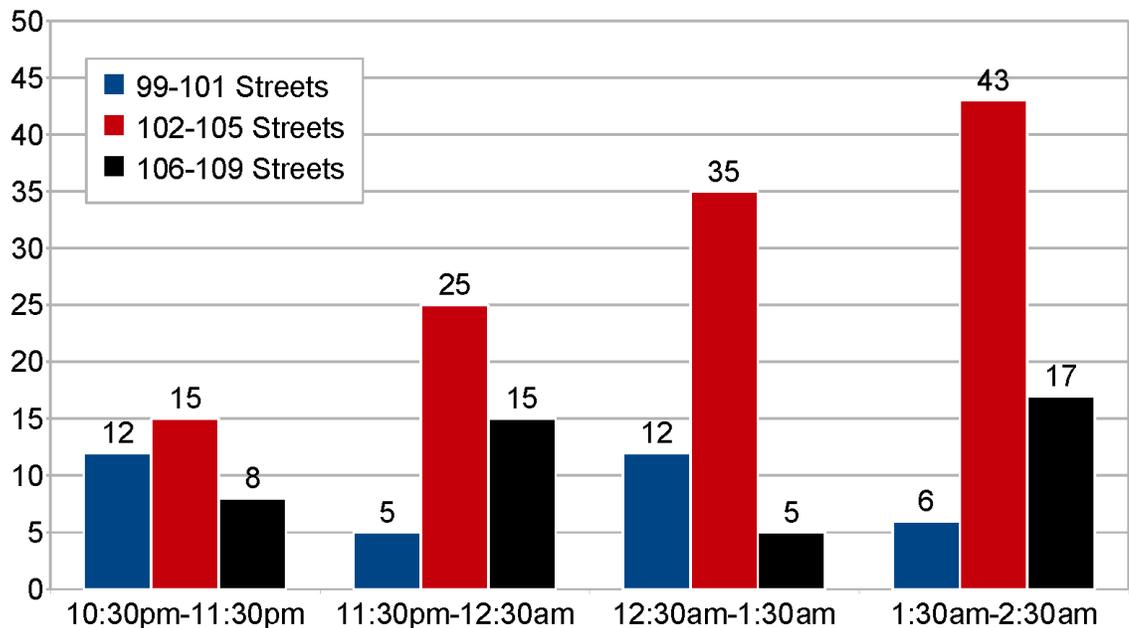
TRUE believes that even if it is argued that New Year's Eve cannot be extrapolated, the relative magnitudes speak for themselves. Further, the "Lower Service Threshold" requires 15 boardings per hour versus the 50 for the "Upper Service Threshold," and is therefore several times easier to meet. We would also like to note that the number 6 ran parallel to the 4 at the same frequency and we estimated it to be at least half as busy.

The next graph shows boardings along Whyte Avenue. The red bars in this graph represent the core of the entertainment district, bracketed by similar length segments on either side. The last set of bars is not normally run. Again, the trend is significant. Boardings is an arguably biased measure since Whyte Avenue will see boardings late at night while other areas will see disembarkings.

Peak Passenger Load along Whyte Avenue



Boardings Along Whyte Avenue by Section



Adding the boardings and disembarkings (passengers who got on and off the bus along this segment of Whyte Avenue) still shows a significant jump up for that first added hour (79 12:30-1:30am versus 97 between 1:30-2:30am), which totals to higher than any hour earlier than 10:30pm. Of course, it should also be noted that a lot of the activity seen earlier in the day wouldn't be seen if the transit system weren't running those later hours.

But again, we believe the most critical measure of success here is that the buses were running at just under their seated capacity of 40 passengers. If this were rush-hour, it would be difficult to call it anything but a success. To see this kind of ridership late at night is both encouraging and disappointing - encouraging that the ridership is clearly there and would continue to be there throughout the year, but disappointing that we continue to fail to provide this needed service year-round.

TRUE urges city council to begin the service extension process immediately. If 24 hour service was "inevitable" last year at this time, as described by the transportation department, when will even a single hour become reality? Transit riders are watching, and as always, waiting.

Further Information

The remainder of TRUE's Shadow Report and other information can be found at:

<http://www.true.apirg.org/>

Created in January 2008, the TRUE sponsored "Expand Edmonton's Transit Service to 24 Hours" has maintained a membership of nearly 4,000 supporters (must be logged in to view):

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=20264767496>

In addition, TRUE's campaign for extended service hours has been supported by local pundits from across the political spectrum:

Dave Rutherford, 630 CHED: [TRUE's] right, if you're working at those kinds of jobs, you're not going to run out and get a loan to buy a car and run that kind of expense, and how can you afford a cab? Why not run the buses into the areas that need it, whenever they need it?

<http://www.true.apirg.org/press/080704.ched.rutherford.mp3>

Kerry Diotte, Edmonton Sun: I'm not a big fan of throwing wads of cash at a scheme that may or may not work, but [TRUE] makes some good arguments...Edmonton has grown – and there's little doubt that transit must improve soon, including extended hours.

<http://www.true.apirg.org/press/full/080110.sun.latenight.jpg>

Todd Babiak, Edmonton Journal: They shut down at one in the morning, in keeping with a sleepy city of 100,000...If you're unfortunate enough to leave for work after nine in the morning or to go home after six, you're destined to wait, and wait, and freeze, and wait.

http://www.edmontonjournal.com/story_print.html?id=1146214&sponsor=



2008 Highlight Issue: 24 Hour Transit

The support for 24 hour transit within TRUE's membership and Shadow Report respondents, as well as within the transit riding population at large, has been so overwhelming that the topic has been given its own section in this report. The Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton supports extending transit service to 24 hours, as do the vast majority of transit riders we have spoken to (bus drivers as well).

Two reports on extending late night service (to 3:30am or 24 hours) were received by city council's Transportation and Public Works Committee on Tuesday, January 22. These reports were then deferred to coincide with the ETS Growth Strategy and Planning Review non statutory public hearing to take place on July 3, along with the ENTRA report which this report is shadowing.

The original report on extending hours to 3:30am estimates that it would add only 4% to ETS's operating budget, neglecting increases in revenue. Extending again to 24 hours would add an additional, small 2%. Edmonton simply cannot afford not to increase service.

A very general estimate of increased ridership for the overnight period was given as 2,000 per night; however, this does not account for other times. Ridership would increase throughout the day as transit dependency becomes more of an option. Without a ride home, riders will not make the trip out by transit either.

ENTRA's report only briefly covers 24 hour transit, allowing for necessary debate from city council. TRUE understands this position, but is unwilling to remain silent on such an important issue. ENTRA's main recommendation is for earlier starts and later finishes; by exactly how much is unclear, but it appears to be in the neighbourhood of an additional half-hour on either end. This is certainly a good start, but is simply not enough.

ENTRA's most crucial point on the issue is to write that "ridership estimates, especially for late night services are very conservative, and there has been no allowance made for an expected positive influence on peak ridership resulting from the increase in off-peak service, as the entire network becomes a more attractive choice to riders. Accounting for these factors will help mitigate the expected lower financial performance of these service improvements."

This is a critical point that was not reflected in the original reports and that TRUE protested accordingly. We believe that there are benefits not only to riders, but to system performance as a whole. Looking only at overnight ridership ignores not only those taking the reverse trip earlier or later in the day (and not in the overnight), but also those who become able and willing to make lifestyle changes including becoming fully transit dependent.

Furthermore, looking only at ridership and revenue numbers misses the role of 24 hour service. Like off-peak service, 24 hour service should not be expected to match the revenue generating potential of peak service. By definition, it is peak service that can and should be the revenue generator. 24 hour service fills a critical social role in transit service that is lacking in Edmonton, and the importance of this role must not be underestimated.

Transit riders require improved late night service for many reasons. Countless jobs in Edmonton require workers to take shifts which end after service ends, or start before service starts. Poor late night service limits social opportunities, and encourages drinking and driving. Cabs are simply too expensive or unavailable due to demand exceeding supply, forcing transit riders and others to walk home.

Among major Canadian cities, Edmonton is best comparable to London, Ontario in terms of end of service. Toronto and Montreal run 24 hours, Vancouver and Ottawa run until 3:30am, Calgary's CTrain runs an hour later and starts up an hour earlier, and Quebec City, Winnipeg, and Hamilton all run later than Edmonton. As a 24 hour city, Edmonton requires 24 hour service. With a population over one million, Edmonton should be vibrant around the clock, not turning in early. It's time for late night routes to be worthy of their name.

Minimum wage workers deserve affordable transportation at all hours, not just 9 to 5. Without late night transit, transportation can eat up half the night's earnings, quickly reducing budgets for other necessities (including housing and education) or making new job opportunities uneconomical and impossible.

Safety is a concern, but not significantly more than it is during other hours of the day. In fact, fewer drunk drivers and more people watching the streets make it safer for everyone. Eliminating nighttime fares would take it a step further, preventing bus drivers from having to double as fare police and benefiting those who need it most.

During the TRUE Transit Challenge to city council, councillor and TPW member Ben Henderson found himself unable to take transit home from Whyte Avenue. Attending a play with Councillor Don Iveson (who elected to take his bike), Councillor Henderson had checked his schedule, and assumed that the 6 would still be running at 12:50am. The play ended half an hour later than expected, and he struggled to find another route home, but eventually had to walk home. Councillor Henderson understands what it means to be transit dependent in Edmonton.

As of Jan 16, 1,000 transit riders had joined a TRUE-sponsored Facebook group called "Expand Edmonton's Transit Service to 24 Hours." Currently, the group has 3,750 members. This is not a minor issue, this is a major part of a successful transit system.

As our respondents write, lack of service is costing jobs and wages, safety and security, and social opportunities. 24 hour jobs and 24 hour study spaces require 24 hour transit to serve them. A city of this size cannot settle for mediocre late night service as the costs will be felt acutely by those already overburdened. Now is the time to extend service to 24 hours.

Dan Duperron: I agree that ETS should make the transit 24 hours for the people that work late at night and need transit to get home. If they do not have a way home they have to walk or take a taxi and sometimes they do not have that kind of cash.

Christine Dyck: I cannot tell you how many times I've been stranded on the other side of the city (other side as opposed to where my home is located) and had to walk or wait for the buses to start running at 5:00-6:00am, and it's hard when it's raining or winter! I think buses do need to be 24 hours, it would help with everything. If it were 24 hours, I think a 30 minute frequency would be fine.

Kim Ferguson: I used to work at Northlands Park, on the other side of town, and it would be difficult to get back after working a night shift, especially on a Sunday. Take the LRT, get an 8 or a 71 from Downtown, an hour later, you're stuck at Lakewood or Millwoods hoping for a 64, or, if it's late, or after 7 on a Sunday, you wait for the 76 or 77. It's gotten to a point where my parents pick me up from Lakewood because the 76 shuts down "late" on a Sunday night. It's not that late. When I go out with friends, be it movies, dinner, clubbing, what have you, I end up needing to call my parents because there's no late service to my neighbourhood, unless I want to walk for 45 minutes to my house from Lakewood. I've had to limit my work hours, costing me money, because I know I can't get home if I work until 11 pm on a Saturday night.

Jillian Frizell: Buses need to operate for more hours and should be running on main routes until after the bars close. Buses should also operate on Sundays as early and as late as they do on weekdays.

Sara Labots: I believe that there should be several routes within the Edmonton area, especially the main routes (1, 2, 4, 6, etc), that should be carrying 24 hour service. Some individuals need to work at 3:00am, and there are absolutely no buses running at that time of night. Especially on weekends, Whyte and Jasper Avenue having 24 hour service would make the option of taking public transit more attractive. To cover costs there should be an introduction of increased fare for any rider that goes on the bus after 2:00am, and possibly a surcharge for bus pass holders. While trying to increase the number of taxis is a good idea, not everyone is willing to pay the amount of money to take a cab home, and people will drive home under the influence because they do not want to take a taxi because of the cost. This is also applicable to LRT service, especially once the expansion is completed. Reduce frequency but still have it running 24 hours. During exam time this is advantageous for students who live off campus who take advantage of the 24 hour open study areas on campus.

Brett Lambert: Increase transit hours of operation! ETS needs to be operating for longer hours, probably 24/7. At the very least, buses need to start running past 1:00am until at least 2:00 or 3:00am.

Fraser Pick: It is ridiculous that people have to walk, taxi, or drive home after 1:00am from Whyte Avenue. This is the reason there is very little bus traffic from the bars: people don't want to leave at 12:45am or earlier.

Anne-Michelle Tessier: Later LRT hours are absolutely essential. The fact that the LRT stops running before bars close is absolutely ridiculous. Likewise, 24 hour bus service is also an essential part of a fully-functioning metropolitan environment. Asking people to rely on cars to get home late at night is dangerous, environmentally-unsound and generally absurd.

Crystal Wellman: The transit system should run for 24 hours a day. Often times I find myself unable to see some of my friends because of a lack of available transportation or I end up stuck in one end of the city because the buses have stopped running at that time of night.

Anonymous: More evening/late night routes would make Edmonton far safer transportation-wise. I hate having to make decisions on when/where to go based on how late routes run. Having recently been to New York, I found that the 24 hour transit was an excellent addition to my trip. Certainly it isn't as frequent as daytime transit, but it does provide a way of getting from point A to point B without having to walk or take costly taxi cabs. I really would find it convenient to be able to volunteer late hours without having to decline due to transit issues. I'm sure many of the volunteer organizations in the City would appreciate having more able volunteers for their events as well!

Iraleigh Anderson: There absolutely needs to be service at night; people who ride Edmonton Transit can't afford cabs home.

Cindy Boucher: Buses should be running 24 hours. The transit system seems to be designed for car owners, considering its hours. It is not a very efficient system right now. Anyone working early or late has to pay to own a car. Not having transit running at least until bars close (3-3:30 am) encourages drunk driving. Not having transit running from at least 4:00am burdens labor workers who sometimes start at 5:30 or 6:00am.

Kathleen Corey: The 128 needs to provide real late service for weekends! If I'm out late near University campus, it takes 40 minutes (involving LRT, the 1, and 4 blocks walking) rather than the usual 10 minutes busing to reach home. I'm not the only one who likes to use this bus on weekends past 7:00pm, shift workers at the hospital and other workers off Whyte would really appreciate extended service hours.

Elizabeth Cytko: I would like buses to run later into the night. I know I had to run like the dickens after picking up the last Harry Potter book at Chapters West Ed to catch my bus home, since it was the last bus to go to Capilano. If I had missed the bus I would have had to take the 4 to Bonnie Doon and walk the half hour home at 1:00am.

Erin denHartigh: If only transit was 24 hour. Never seems to be a bus when you need one.

During our campaign for 24 hour transit in early 2008, TRUE collected the following quotes from members of TRUE and "Expand Edmonton's Transit Service to 24 Hours":

"When I took a management position at my new job I had to make a choice, ride transit and risk losing my job due to the fact that I can't reliably say when I will be at work, or take cabs to and from work every day at \$15 per ride and have no extra cash for myself. I chose the latter and it is not fun, **I spend more than \$600 in a month now for taxi service and it's killing me.** We as workers run the infrastructure of this city so we need to be able to get to work to keep it up!"

"I honestly don't know why this hasn't already been done. Does the City not realize that there are thousands of people working nights, every night? **I know I've turned down many a good night shift job,** simply because I don't own a car, so I wouldn't have the means to get to the job, and back home."

"I've had to swallow many a \$30 cab fare to get to work for 7:30am on a holiday at my most recent job, and I had a weekly \$10 cab fare to get to my 6:45am shift every Saturday at the job previous to that. It's a little ridiculous to have to pay 1-2 hours in wages to get to work on time just because the buses aren't running that early. It's not like I was working at 4am. People still work on weekends and holidays. I think 24-hour service is still necessary, perhaps with reduced frequency. **I don't mind leaving ridiculously early if it means I still get to eat that day.**"

"I don't think the City realizes how many people in the hospitality industry they're currently shafting by stopping service so early. The people working in the bars and in the restaurants are generally young people or other **people with not a whole lot of income...** We need those buses running at the end of our shifts!"

"Because transit is my only form of transportation, unless I beg someone for a ride, **I am unable to be out past midnight on the weekend or during the week.** I know that in the industrial area shifts do not always start at midnight. Besides, we are not a little city of 500,000 any more. We are a major metropolitan city that operates 24/7."

"As a long time university student and Edmonton public transit user, I firmly believe that Edmonton needs a 24 hour transit system. As a growing urban metropolis, Edmonton must keep itself in-line with other such cities around Canada and around the world. Edmonton is quickly becoming a 24/7 city, and its transit system should attempt to keep up with Edmonton's dynamic growth. Also to consider is the reduction of **impaired driving charges** throughout the city, but particularly in the Downtown core and Whyte Avenue areas."

"I've lost jobs and been turned away from jobs because of my dependence on transit, but it was because of the lack of early morning service rather than late night service, particularly on the weekends. A lot of places want people to be available to start work at 6:00am. The first bus that goes by my house is at 5:30am. It's usually after 6:00am by the time I get downtown to transfer to another bus, never mind get to a worksite. At my last job, my regular shift started at 7:30am. I had to catch the 5:30am bus to get there in time. On Sundays and holidays, that bus doesn't run until 30 minutes later and **I would have to either be 30 minutes late for my shift or pay more than 2 hours in wages (\$30) to be on time.** My previous job, when I was living in Jackson Heights, was a similar situation. I could get to work for 6:30am on a weekday but I had to pay \$10 for a cab ride (1 hour of wages) or be 30 minutes late on a weekend."

"I can go out to the bar but I can't get back home, **it's like the city is promoting drinking and driving...**"

"I will say that it was annoying when I was working for a company in the Research Park (by South Common) and had to take a training shift or something that went until midnight. Without the company shuttle to Jasper Ave, there's no way I would have been able to get home. That shuttle is being cancelled as of January, by the way. If the shuttle was a few minutes behind schedule, I would miss the last route 1 heading west, and instead of the 6-block walk from Jasper Gates to my house (I would only have 1 block if the 2 were still running), I had to walk all the way from Commerce Place. **That's a long walk, especially for a female late at night.** And especially in the middle of the winter."

"The industrial areas are serviced only during peak hours. Which means that if you need to go to an appointment or are called away from work due to a family emergency or illness, **you are essentially out of pocket the price of cab fare.** There are people who work in the industrial areas who, I am sure, would appreciate more flexible route schedules, particularly those who work flex time or part time. After having taken the MetroRail in Washington, DC, it's abundantly clear to me just how sorry our transit system truly is."

"I find it so hard to go anywhere in the evening because **I can never get a ride home besides a cab...and that adds up!** Making the ETS run 24 hours would not only increase ridership but it would also be the best thing that they have ever done for the city! There are so many reasons that this is a good idea!"

