



Shadow Report to Edmonton City Council

ETS Growth Strategy and Planning Review

Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton

(eds. B. Gould, L. Pagnotta, B. Van Alstine)

July 3, 2008

AP!RG

Summary

This report is intended to complement ENTRA Consultants Inc.'s ETS Growth Strategy and Planning review with the Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton's unique rider-based perspective. Responses from 24 volunteer authors were compiled by 3 editors from TRUE's leadership.

TRUE believes that increased ridership is crucial for Edmonton's future. Not only does increased ridership generate revenue that fare increases cannot, and allow for service increases to benefit all riders, but it provides benefits to new riders and society as a whole.

Taking transit (alone, or in combination with cycling and walking) increases an individual's direct interaction with their environment, giving people convenient access to activities throughout a city. It also helps to build stronger communities, creating social and cultural networks. In order to increase ridership, transit must be improved, and the following points summarize what that means to riders.

As transit riders indicate in their responses, the most effective way to boost ridership is to provide a service that is attractive. This means accepting lower revenue recovery in the short-term, increasing service well beyond that currently provided, and implementing a host of changes to the system, many of which are outlined in this report.

TRUE is concerned with recent attempts to increase the revenue/cost ratio by increasing the cost of a monthly adult pass, as increased costs lower ridership. Fewer riders will be able to afford the benefits of unlimited transit. TRUE recommends moving towards a system whereby fares are tied to inflation and any further increase requires justification and advertising at the same time as increased fares are advertised. The current plan is baffling to riders.

As our respondents write, lack of late night service is costing jobs and wages, safety and security, and social opportunities. Looking only at overnight ridership ignores not only those taking the reverse trip earlier or later in the day, but also those who become fully transit dependent. Furthermore, looking only at ridership and revenue numbers misses the role of 24 hour service. It fills a social role in transit service that is lacking in Edmonton, and the importance of this role must not be underestimated.

TRUE believes that we need to move away from a tradition of band-aid route planning solutions. If we are truly interested in providing an improved service, we will need to begin with a complete reassessment of the system to design a network pattern for growth and ridership, not budget savings. Mainline routes should be straightened to provide more effective service, and emphasis should be put on frequency rather than minimizing transfers.

Transit riders observe that service in outlying areas tends to suffer. Mill Woods still struggles with off-peak service, especially internally, and industrial areas are also commonly cited as receiving poor coverage. Often these routes run hourly or half-hourly service during weekday peak hours only and are meandering and inefficient.



TRUE questions the utility of dozens of routes with only a few peak weekday trips. Effective transit service requires much more frequent service, and TRUE recommends a target of 15 minute service for all peak hour service, and 30 minutes otherwise (including evenings and weekends). A route without this frequency will not attract riders and is a function of poor route choice or development practice. TRUE suggests a threshold for convenient peak service of 5 minutes for the shorter trips practiced by many transit dependent riders, and that ENTRAs 10 minute value is more appropriate for commuters traveling long distances.

TRUE members believe that much can be learned from transit in other cities. While each system is different, commonly cited advantages include extensive rail transit, frequent and effective bus service, and well-planned routes. Additionally, cost is usually comparable for a much more comprehensive service. One simple detail that other cities are using to great success is arrival information signage and schedule information tailored to specific bus stops.

Transit riders are generally excited about LRT expansion. Some members would like to see more long-term and holistic planning to unify the Transportation Master Plan (TMP), Municipal Development Plan (MDP), and LRT plans. We would also like to see better use made of express and semi-express bus service as a precursor to LRT.

TRUE members are quite pleased with security. Riders view potential 24 hour transit service as a positive to security by providing more eyes on the streets and a safe ride home. Transit riders would like to see heated and clean shelters, and transit facilities designed in concert with transit supportive development.

Overall, TRUE supports the proposed Growth Strategy, but would like to see a commitment to 24 hour transit, to continuing capital investment beyond the five years detailed, to reassessing the entire route network to better suit growth, and to rationalizing fare policy.



Contents

1	Summary
3	Contents
	Introduction to:
4	the Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton
5	the Shadow Report
6	the Authors
9	the Editors
	Transit Riders write about:
10	Costs and Fares
13	LRT and Express Bus Service
16	Routes, Connections, and Timings
18	Security
19	Service Coverage
21	Service Frequencies
23	Transit Centres, LRT Stations, and Bus Shelters
24	Transit in Other Cities
26	Promotion and Increasing Ridership
29	2008 Highlight Issue: 24 Hour Transit
35	Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations



The Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton

The Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton works to channel transit riders' needs and opinions into a unified voice for an efficient, affordable, and accessible public transit system. TRUE is a working group of the Alberta Public Interest Research Group (APIRG).

TRUE operates as an independent, non-hierarchical collective which allows all members to suggest and manage aspects of its operation. All group decisions are consensus based, and monthly meetings are fully open to the public. Transit riders do not have to be members to participate in the group's activities. TRUE lobbies for improved transit in Edmonton on behalf of transit riders, its members.

In November, TRUE challenged city council to give up their cars for a week. Four councillors (Don Iveson, Amarjeet Sohi, Ben Henderson, and Dave Thiele) relied exclusively on transit. TRUE believes that to serve the needs of Edmonton's transit riders, one must understand what it means to be transit dependent in Edmonton. Councillors gained an appreciation for the strengths and weaknesses of Edmonton's transit system and will be able to base their future decisions on first-hand experience. Participating councillors have continued taking transit more often long after the conclusion of the challenge.

In January, TRUE led a campaign for 24 hour transit. 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 to attempt unsafe walks home. TRUE administers a Facebook group called "Expand Edmonton's Transit Service to 24 Hours" which has about 3,750 members at the time of writing. Our efforts raised the profile of this underpublicized issue and contributed to city administration and councillors declaring 24 hour service "inevitable."

TRUE is currently filming a transit documentary in partnership with Active Citizens Television (ACTV), tentatively scheduled for release later this summer. The documentary includes interviews with riders, TRUE members, and city councillors, and simultaneously covers transit in Edmonton and TRUE's advocacy role.

Now one year old, TRUE has more than 220 registered members who advocate for improved transit in Edmonton. Thousands more support its campaigns.

More information is available at www.true.apirg.org

It's TRUE!

We need your voice!



About the Shadow Report

As part of the Edmonton Transit System Growth Strategy and Planning Review, ENTRA Consultants Inc. were retained by ETS to update service strategies to increase ridership. A report will be formally received by council and opened to a non-statutory public hearing on July 3, 2008. This Shadow Report is intended to complement ENTRA's report with TRUE's uniquely rider-based perspective. TRUE's transparency and approachability help facilitate an open and honest dialogue, both between transit riders and between transit riders and city officials. This report provides transit riders with a direct and independent route to voice their feelings about transit in Edmonton and is intended to complement the official review.

The Shadow Report consists entirely of material written, collected, and edited by transit riders. Answers have been edited for clarity and length by the editorial team to produce a more cohesive final product. During the process of our material collection, often differing viewpoints on a single issue would be provided. In this case, every effort has been taken to reflect the diversity of opinion.

Material was collected online and at our April 21 workshop, advertised with posters and open to the public. At the workshop, participants also collaboratively created the figures that appear on the following pages of the report. In each case, to promote independent thought, riders were presented with a list of topics for comment, rather than asked potentially leading questions.

Where important differences or similarities exist between ENTRA's report and the Shadow Report, these will be highlighted in the appropriate section. Inevitably, recommendations will differ somewhat, but that is not the sole focus of this report. Certainly, each report contains valuable information for the planning of ETS services over the next five years and beyond.

One issue left intentionally underdiscussed by ENTRA's report is 24 hour transit service, in the interests of allowing for sufficient debate. As TRUE previously discovered in the lead-up to our 24 hour transit campaign this past January, riders overwhelmingly support 24 hour transit. To reflect this and give the issue the attention it deserves, 24 hour transit has been given its own highlighted section of this report.

TRUE believes that transit riders have the best understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of transit in Edmonton and should have their opinions and experiences heard.



About the Authors

TRUE's Shadow Report wouldn't have been possible without the help of our volunteer panel of 24 everyday transit experts. Here's what they had to say about themselves:

Iraleigh Anderson rides the bus as a primary means of transportation and often bikes in concert with the 1, 4, 9, and LRT. He feels that he has a pretty good understanding of the ETS route system and finds himself defending its merits to his friends.

Douglas Bearchell describes himself as “a simple guy trying to make a living and raise a family.” He'd like to see better service, lower fares, and more security.

Amanda Kali Rose Blaylock is a 17-year-old student at Victoria School for the Arts and works downtown. She wishes transit could help her and her friends better enjoy Edmonton's long summer nights.

Cindy Boucher is a University of Alberta graduate student. She thinks 24 hour transit would be more efficient and help shift workers as well as reducing drunk driving.

Kelsey Chegus is a recent graduate of the mechanical engineering program at the University of Alberta. She doesn't own a vehicle, and is familiar with both StAT and ETS.

Kathleen Corey wants to put pressure on government and industry to uphold their environmental responsibilities. She also believes strongly in mass public transportation and wants the City of Edmonton to drastically improve the current transit system.

Elizabeth Cytko is a 20-year-old who relies on transit to get around. She likes the service in her neighbourhood, with a few exceptions, but can't stand being squeezed into a bus.

Erin denHartigh is a grade eleven student at Victoria School for the Arts. She takes the bus every day, which means having to buy tickets to supplement her weekday-only student pass.

Dan Duperron is a 41-year-old who uses transit all the time. He thinks ETS is doing a great job, but would like to see new trolleys and 24 hour service.

Christine Dyck is a 19-year-old Edmontonian who finds it a hard place to live without a car. She'd love to see less people having to drive, so that there would be less pollution in the air, less drunk driving, and fewer accidents.

Kim Ferguson is an undergraduate student at the University of Alberta who lives in the Knottwood neighbourhood of Mill Woods. She doesn't drive or have a license and has used public transit since 2003 to get to school, work, recreation, and shopping.



Isabelle Foord is a low-income senior who has happily given up her car to ride transit for the past three years. She often accompanies her son on DATS.

Jillian Frizell is in her thirties and works in the public sector. She thinks off-peak service could use extending and that currently inconvenience is a barrier to increased ridership.

Sara Labots is a 19-year-old working full-time and attending classes part-time at Grant MacEwan City Center Campus.

Brett Lambert is a fourth year university student. Brett doesn't let a lack of late night service keep him at home – he's walked from the west end to the university area in the wee hours of the morning.

Fraser Pick is a 19-year-old university student who is impressed by the LRT and express service planning under way, but unimpressed by a lack of late night service.

Michael Spears is a thirty-something in public relations with the Alberta Liberal Caucus. Michael loves using public transit, but high fares have him driving in from Fort Saskatchewan to catch the LRT.

Navid Tabatabai is a 22-year-old student who uses ETS in combination with his bike to get wherever he needs. He'd like to see more bike racks on buses.

Anne-Michelle Tessier is a professor at the University of Alberta who doesn't own a car. She commutes from downtown to the main campus by LRT, and takes a bus to Whyte Avenue for shopping and evenings out.

Ian Weetman is a 24-year-old journalism/professional writing student at MacEwan's Centre for the Arts. He doesn't drive, and 90% of his daily commuting is via ETS.

Crystal Wellman is a 17-year-old student at a downtown school. She doesn't drive and takes transit between 4 and 10 times a day, visiting people from all over the city.

Dawn West is a 24-year-old travel agent. She'd like to see more electric transit to help dull higher fuel prices and believes that boosting ridership is as simple as providing the service.

Ian Young is a 44-year-old brain injury/stroke survivor with what he describes as an "obvious disability." A member of the Alberta Brain Injury Community, he works part-time, attends university, volunteers, and uses ETS on a regular basis.

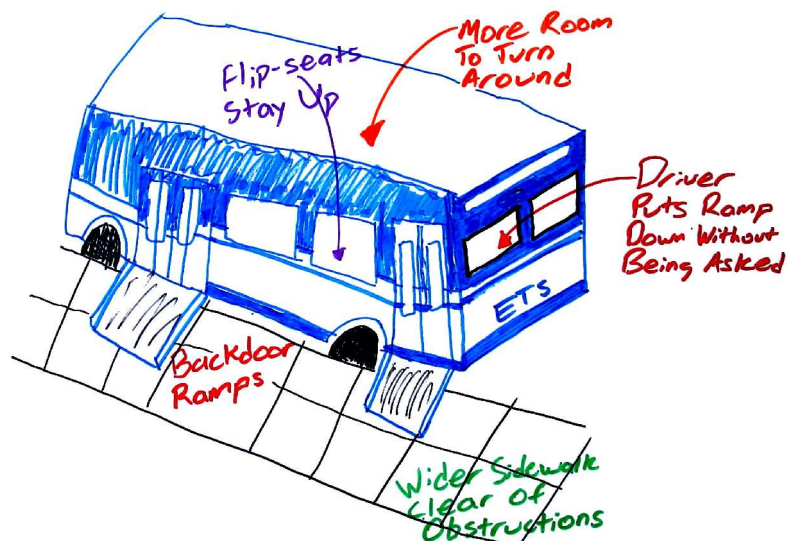
And our lone **Anonymous** respondent is a full-time student at the University of Alberta, a full-time employee at a major grocery store, and a volunteer.

Thank you to all the members of the Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton who contributed their stories in person, through our transit experience reports, and on our website and Facebook group.





Accessible Buses



About the Editors

Three members of TRUE's leadership formed the editorial panel for this project. In addition to leading our authors, organizing the material, and compiling the report, our editors provided additional material in key areas and summarized the positions of both our authors and the union membership as a whole. Here's what they had to say about themselves:

Brian Gould joined TRUE in May 2007 and serves public relations roles with the group. A transportation planner specializing in non-automobile modes, he is a recent graduate of the University of Alberta (Civil Engineering) and a Masters of City Planning candidate at the University of California, Berkeley. A vocal critic of the suburban-industrial complex, automobile dependence, current energy policy, and misguided planning regulations, he advocates for lower impact transportation and development. Brian currently bikes to work, but relies on ETS and his feet to get him everywhere else. In protest of ever-increasing monthly pass prices, he is relying on tickets this summer and reducing his transit costs by taking fewer trips. When not organizing with TRUE, he writes transportation-related opinion pieces for the Gateway and letters to various newspapers. Brian also organizes high school take-home events for the APEGGA Edmonton Science Olympics. Previously, he led TRUE's campaign for 24 hour transit.

Lorenzo Pagnotta is a founding member of TRUE and a group administrator responsible for organizing meetings, workshops, and presentations. He believes in sustainable urban transportation and that changing the "car culture" we live in is one of the most relevant issues that Canada faces today. Soon to graduate from the University of Alberta with a degree in Drama and Italian Studies, he is a co-founder and facilitator of the Italian Arts Outreach group, the recently appointed Alberta Delegate of the newly formed Federation of Italian-Canadian Youth, a member of the groundbreaking seniors performance company GeriActors, and a member of the Exposure Festival marketing committee. He is also involved in Project Porchlight, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting energy efficiency throughout the province by distributing one million CFL lightbulbs. In addition to leading TRUE's ongoing documentary project, Lorenzo is responsible for the implementation of Transit Experience Reports.

Brendan Van Alstine is a registered social worker and founding member of TRUE, in which he has served in an organizational and leadership role as one of the group's administrators. Brendan has worked in a range of fields over the years including mental health, addictions, housing, life skills, and currently works with sexual minority youth in Edmonton's inner city. Brendan relies exclusively on ETS, his bicycle, and walking as means of transportation and has a special interest on the impact of transit - or lack thereof - on the quality of life of people. Both TRUE itself and TRUE's successful Transit Challenge to City Council were ideas with which Brendan can be credited.



Transit Riders on Costs and Fares

Through the vast majority of responses, transit riders have indicated that they find the fares to be too expensive. Those who find the fare increases reasonable indicate that it is understandable given the price of gas. Current fares begin to make it difficult for minimum wage workers, and further increases will only exacerbate the problem.

The U-Pass program received high praise from all those who mentioned it, but it was pointed out that because the cost is not covered for the full year, students may not be able to afford a pass over the summer or decide to drive instead. A suggestion was made to introduce similar programs to employers, and a further suggestion was made to eliminate fares entirely, thus saving fare collection costs and boosting ridership while making transit affordable for all.

One respondent points out that the AISH transit subsidy does not apply to DATS customers. Further, escorts are not permitted to ride free on DATS as they are on the rest of the system. This seems discriminatory and contrary to the goals of DATS.

TRUE is concerned with recent attempts to increase the revenue/cost ratio by increasing the cost of a monthly adult pass. Firstly, increased costs lower ridership, and lowered ridership will negate much if not all of the gain. Secondly, increasing the cost of monthly passes results in fewer riders being able to afford the benefits of unlimited transit. There is a great mental difference between something which is covered by an initial payment and something which requires payment at each use. Forcing transit riders to switch to tickets will lower the likelihood they will take trips other than those strictly necessary for survival. Social trips are curtailed, as the prospect of \$4 (or \$5 if cash) to make a trip is a strong disincentive.

If the new policy is intended to increase revenue from choice commuters more able to absorb fare increases, it is important to consider the effect on those less able to absorb the increase. Perhaps a much cheaper pass for off-peak travel only would help rectify the situation, as this would proportionately benefit low income riders more and help from a systems perspective by filling up off-peak buses.

It is, however, understood that both inflation and the rising price of gas put financial pressure on operations. It is especially understood that inflation is reasonable to pass on to the rider, as relative costs are not increasing. The price of gas is similar, although increasing fares to cover this negates the power of high gas prices to induce a modal shift towards transit. In the current situation, riders see fare increases with little explanation or increased benefit. Transit riders may be willing to absorb increases which provide them additional service, but when the service is the same (and more crowded) it causes concern.

TRUE recommends moving towards a system whereby fares are tied to inflation, and any further increase requires justification and advertising at the same time as increased fares are advertised. The current plan to increase monthly fares year after year by significant amounts with no justification except cost recovery is baffling to riders. Such dramatic increases further lower ridership.



Crystal Wellman: The prices keep going up and the cost of public transportation is starting to get ridiculous. If the prices keep jumping like this, I'm going to have difficulty paying for the simple cost of transportation. I understand that some changes in price are to be expected with inflation taken into account, but I also know that lately the prices of bus passes have been going up by a lot more than they have in the past. Adult monthly passes went from \$59 to \$66.50, and I recently heard that they will be going up again within the year.

Dawn West: The fares are reasonable, but with fuel prices going up LRT and electric buses will be needed.

Anonymous: I love the new U-Pass, but public transit in Edmonton is more expensive than in many other major cities I've visited. If we want to decrease traffic congestion and improve the environment, cost will be a factor until the system is sufficiently strong. I don't mind the cost as it is far less expensive than driving (including environmental costs and financial costs).

Iraleigh Anderson: I would be willing to pay a higher fare if there was increased service at night on routes 1,4,8,9 and the LRT. I also think that there needs to be a reasonable way for low income residents to secure a yearly bus pass.

Douglas Bearchell: I buy two passes, one for me and one for my wife, for a total of \$133 every month; ETS is far too costly.

Amanda Kali Rose Blaylock: I know gas prices are very high, and honestly I'm not going to complain about fares because of this. I would only complain about the initial killer of gas prices.

Kelsey Chegus: The U-Pass arrangement for university students is excellent! Keep it up!

Kathleen Corey: Not everyone can afford the monthly pass, and some of those who can settle for tickets, relying on cars for leisure time. If ETS wants Edmontonians to really use their system, the price to ride needs to be attractive. Charges based on zoning would lower the cost for spontaneous, short trips. This would be a much fairer system and the ridership could be increased.

Elizabeth Cytko: I would like reasonable fares. I understand about price hikes due to the rising price of gas, but I would rather that considerations were taken for those who are on the meager minimum wage.

Erin denHartigh: I find the fares hard to cover. Through the week I have a student bus pass, but I attend weekend classes and have extracurricular activities which are a nuisance to get to - especially during the winter, which is most of the year here.

Dan Duperron: I think the fares are a good value for this city; it is not hard to find \$2.50 to ride all across the city.



Christine Dyck: I really hope the fares don't go up more; \$2.50 for an adult is outrageous! I remember the days I could get on the bus for \$1.25 and now you have to have \$5 to go both ways. A 90 minute transfer is certainly not enough! It should at least be 2 hours, giving a person the time to go somewhere and get back on one transfer.

Isabelle Foord: I'm extremely grateful for the low-income seniors pass. It improves my life about 1000%! However, my son's DATS pass has become more expensive. Some years ago, AISH clients were given a transit subsidy, but not for DATS. This is rank discrimination and needs to be rectified. When my son rides the bus, his escort rides free. When he rides DATS, his escort must pay full fare. I feel these discrepancies are due to a misguided effort to make DATS profitable. If the city wants to make transportation profitable, I suggest a tax on cars.

Kim Ferguson: I've found my U-Pass to be the most useful thing, but as a spring term student this year it's going to be tough, money-wise and convenience-wise, because the U-Pass only covers September to April.

Jillian Frizell: Taking the bus is still much cheaper than operating a car.

Sara Labots: While increasing the prices of passes is in accordance with gas prices, this is not the only thing that the bus pass money is going to. Introducing an adult annual pass, I believe, would be an advantage and make it far more convenient for people.

Brett Lambert: I wish there would be a freeze to increase in fares/monthly passes, especially in light of ETS' inefficient transit service. I'm just thankful that we now have a U-Pass program for the school year - but going back to \$60/month is just rough.

Fraser Pick: The fares are way too high for the transit system we have. Maybe if the system itself was open later and more efficient it would justify the high prices. Also the U-Pass is very popular at the University of Alberta, but now that the term is coming to an end and people are looking at transportation options for the summer, many are looking at driving again as a monthly bus pass is nearly the same as the 8 month U-Pass. Student rates need to be much lower then they are right now for a summer bus pass.

Michael Spears: The City of Edmonton's deal with the City of Fort Saskatchewan forces me to drive my car into Edmonton because it would cost me an additional \$80 per month to purchase a bus pass for use within Fort Saskatchewan, in addition to the \$62.50 per month for riding the LRT from Clareview.

Navid Tabatabai: I would say fares are a little bit too high. The price is comparable with other major cities, but our level of service is much lower (e.g. Calgary and Vancouver).

Ian Weetman: ETS should work with the province to eliminate transit fares. Plenty of money and staff are being used to sell tickets and passes, collect fares, and distribute the money that could be better used to expand service. It would also be a great way to drive up overall use of transit.



Transit Riders on LRT and Express Buses

Transit riders are generally excited about LRT expansion. The direct and quick routes dramatically improve mobility for transit riders. Council's recent push for expanded LRT has been received very favourably. There is some disagreement among our membership about priorities for expansion, as there are among the general public. West Edmonton and Mill Woods are given as priorities more often than NAIT/North Edmonton, though few would disagree that such a line would be a benefit.

Some of TRUE's members are concerned that expansion is proceeding without sufficient planning. While the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) and Municipal Development Plan (MDP) are both underway, it seems that there is little attention to laying out a long-term LRT network from a development and operations perspective. Tying the NAIT line directly into the downtown tunnel makes sense in the short term, but may eliminate other extension options, limit future maximum frequencies, and lead to a commuter-centric system focused on a few blocks of Downtown rather on moving people around the denser parts of the city.

TRUE would also like to see better use made of express bus service. High-frequency corridors with cost-effective transit priority measures could be used as a precursor to LRT to gauge ridership and test routings, as well as serve runs between future LRT lines and existing transit centres. Currently, it seems as though express routes are focused on outer suburbs and downtown – limiting their utility by ignoring vast swaths of Edmonton. It is also important to remember that local bus service is critical for shorter trips and those with reduced mobility. Implementing LRT or express service should not be used as justification to eliminate service on parallel bus routes.

Navid Tabatabai: Expand the LRT everywhere! I'm happy that it's going south.

Anne-Michelle Tessier: The LRT does not run as often as it should, and delays are too frequent. For the fares that we pay (comparable to those in Toronto and Montreal) we should have much more frequent service.

Ian Weetman: Express buses should be used as a placeholder for LRT. Commuting patterns should be re-established by having future station sites in mind and have express buses service these spots in the meanwhile. The city needs more direct express bus routes from places like downtown to outlying transit centres like Jasper Place. It currently takes me at least 30 minutes to get from Jasper and 101 Street to Jasper Place Transit Centre if I don't catch the 111 which only runs during limited hours. A trip by car takes half that time.

Crystal Wellman: The LRT should run more frequently, and the expansion of the LRT system should take less time to construct.

Dawn West: Both are needed and should be expanded as the city grows.



Anonymous: I love the LRT! I've been taking it as long as I remember, even when I lived in Fort Saskatchewan as a child. It's super convenient, fast and economical. If only it would have more lines and/or connect to more of the city; then it would be infinitely better!

Douglas Bearchell: LRT to WEM should be a top priority. The LRT has good service, but should run longer and later.

Amanda Kali Rose Blaylock: I've heard the LRT might be expanded to the west end and I think this is a very good idea. It should eventually expand around the entire city; it's the quickest, most efficient form of transportation.

Kelsey Chegus: Investment in expanding the LRT system is well worth it. If the system could be expanded to the suburbs it could drastically reduce commuter traffic. Investment in the LRT also needs to be coupled with policies that encourage more people to take advantage of the service in order to draw in enough revenue.

Kathleen Corey: SLRT extension is awesome news and mustn't stop there. Our LRT map should resemble branches of a tree, rather than just a line, replacing all major bus routes of Edmonton and decreasing the need for more buses. In the short run it might seem expensive, but gas prices will continue to rise. Investing in the LRT is the best choice now and in the future.

Elizabeth Cytko: More LRT please. Going to West Ed is an ordeal for me since it usually takes an hour - 45 minutes one way on the bus to get there, express or no express. I live in the east, which obviously makes the distance very long and bothersome. I would like to think "I will take the LRT it will get me there right away" instead of asking myself "do I feel up to taking a long bus ride to wander around a large mall and then take a long bus ride home?"

Erin denHartigh: Express buses pass me by when I'm late in the mornings, which makes me fairly bitter. They cater to a select group, and in all likelihood they cater to that group quite conveniently. Perhaps we could have more express access (like for major sports events) for other, smaller city attractions: Fort Ed, the Muttart Conservatory, ski hills, maybe even collaborate with events and festivals going on in the city and have buses going straight to them for the duration of the events.

Dan Duperron: The buses and the LRT are the best I have seen.

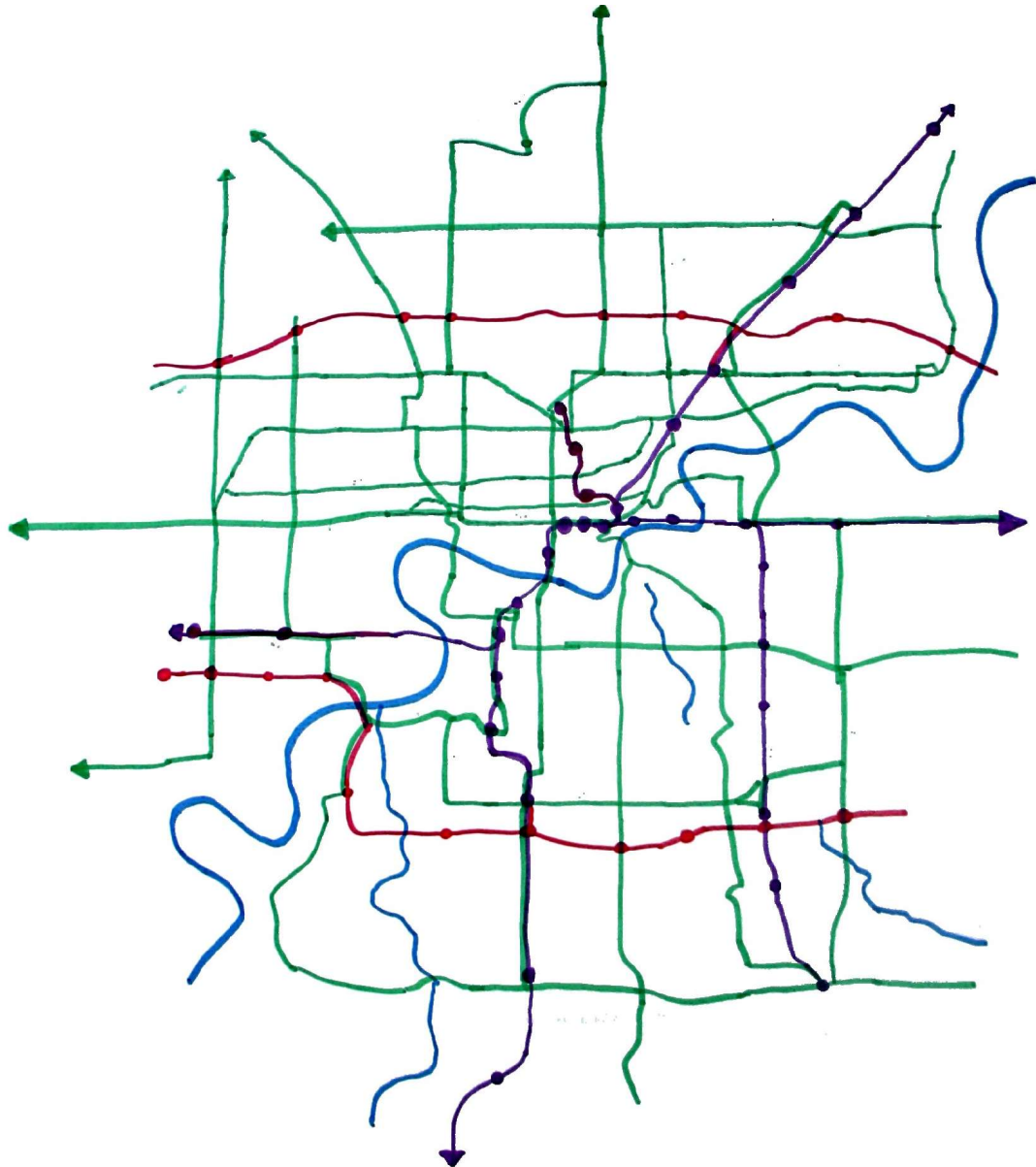
Kim Ferguson: I think Edmonton would do better to adopt a multi-line system, which Paris and Rome use with great results. Edmonton should consider creating an entirely separate line, perhaps going to Mill Woods. Paris has the RER (commuter rail), a line that extends to the hamlets and suburbs. This can be applied to Edmonton's further away districts, such as Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove and St. Albert. The 71 Express from Mill Woods to Downtown used to run almost the same route as the 8 Abbotsfield from Mill Woods, but didn't stop at every single stop the 8 does, hence express. Last year, however, its route changed to serve Lakewood neighbourhood and now doesn't stop at Lakewood Transit Centre and takes the same amount of time as the 8. What's so "express" about that?



Jillian Frizell: Downtown and west Edmonton service is excellent with express buses.

Brett Lambert: There needs to be a lot of LRT expansion in all areas of the city. When the South LRT reaches Heritage it will be of great benefit to me, but I really hope there is some extension to the west end as well. I haven't used express buses because they tend to run infrequently or not to the destinations I need. I do like the idea of express buses, but LRT is something that should be the main focus.

Fraser Pick: I am most impressed by LRT. It seems to me that the municipal government, as a whole, has recognized the need for this service and is acting accordingly. It could be moving a little faster but I am still very happy about the progress.



Transit Riders on Routes and Timings

TRUE meetings inevitably include a discussion of bus routes and timings, containing quite similar material to that supplied by our respondents. One major complaint is that the current route system is designed to minimize the investment required to meet standards. Additionally, a downtown focus serves suburban commuters at the expense of all other transit riders.

One key complaint from transit riders in Edmonton with regard to route layout is the system of circuitous and lengthy routes, particularly the meandering mainline routes. Generally, for those not familiar with the system and routes, these long and meandering bus routes cause confusion and in general present a barrier to attracting new riders, who will often opt to drive rather than hassle with route maps and schedules.

TRUE understands that these routes were designed in an attempt to reduce transfers and theoretically make the system more appealing in doing so. Certainly this form of direct ride route network appeals to specific segments of the transit rider population, in particular, those with reduced mobility for whom walking an extra few blocks to catch a bus is difficult, if not impossible. However, TRUE does not feel that direct ride routes are applicable for mainline routes, which should be used to move passengers quickly and frequently.

An over-reliance on direct ride routes creates situations like the commonly cited Whyte Avenue section from the University to 99 Street where the 4, 6, and 106 overlap service. While this provides more service to the area than a single route and is certainly required, often the routes are timed such that the routes follow each other in quick succession, leaving a 15 minute gap to the next batch, rather than providing a much more convenient 5 minute headway for the short trips practiced in this area. 118 Avenue has the further disadvantage of a dearth of service which travels down 118 Avenue for any significant length.

TRUE understands that this is to facilitate transfers; however, often these transfers are missed and the effects of the low frequencies become even more apparent. We believe that a better option would be to improve the frequencies so that transfers are no longer an issue. Further, routes should be straightened to provide more convenient service for unfamiliar trips.

As well as making the system more appealing to existing riders, adopting a grid structure would also likely attract new ridership; following major roadways in direct lines makes for an easier to understand and use system, and reduces trip times by not requiring buses to meander through residential neighbourhoods. To cite an example from Vancouver, the route 41 from UBC to Joyce Station simply takes Marine Drive from UBC to its intersection with 41 Avenue, and then follows 41 Avenue in a direct line to its destination.

ENTRA's report includes that routes should be reassessed to serve the South LRT extension and add cross-town service. TRUE believes that this risks continuing the tradition of band-aid solutions. If we are truly interested in providing an improved service, we will need to begin with a complete reassessment of the system to design a network pattern for growth and ridership, not budget savings.



Brett Lambert: Right now the transit system is geared for those heading to downtown. The reality is most people don't live downtown and/or their destinations aren't always downtown. There needs to be more connections to other parts of the city, and they need to be more efficient.

Fraser Pick: There has got to be a more logical way of getting from Point A to Point B. The city should look at getting an expert to review the current system and help revamp it.

Navid Tabatabai: I've actually noticed a marked improvement in this in the past while so good job! It frustrates me that the 4, 6, and 106 always come as a pack of three when they travel west on Whyte Avenue. Because of that, the bus really only comes every 15 minutes - whereas it could be every 5 minutes if they were spaced out evenly.

Ian Weetman: LRT and bus schedules need to be better timed so people aren't literally running down stairs and across platforms just to make their local bus connection. I know this from my daily sprint at Coliseum station for the #8. A downtown loop bus would help get people around the CBD. My suggested route is Jasper Avenue, 124 Street, 104 Avenue, and 97 or 101 Street, running every 5-10 minutes.

Dawn West: Most routes are good, but some routes could be more direct and less convoluted. Connections need some work; some routes just miss each other by minutes at transit centers. This becomes very important for late night, Sunday and holiday service when frequency drops.

Ian Young: A lack of organization, proper timing, and efficient service (overlapping routes) all affect the rider experience.

Amanda Kali Rose Blaylock: Timings. They either come early or late. The bus drivers should be more precise and maybe even sit at every stop until they've reached the designated stop time.

Kathleen Corey: I take the 6 to work. It takes 20 minutes by car, but an additional 30 minutes (at least) by bus. My colleague, who took this bus route, stopped busing a year ago and now drives to work. I had the choice to drive, but decided not to for environmental reasons; however, not everyone has the same outlook and if ETS wants to encourage busing over driving, their service has to be much faster.

Erin denHartigh: The routes are all around inconvenient. My route to school is a long, roundabout, loopy mess around Grant MacEwan. There's really no quick way downtown from 149 Street, especially with the 116 running only at peak hours. I'm sure LRT in the west end of the city will make things easier.

Dan Duperron: The routes and connections are the best I have seen, since moving here to Edmonton.

Christine Dyck: I cannot tell you how many times I've been on the train and got to Clareview just in time to see my bus leave; they should wait for the people on the LRT so we don't have to wait a whole 30 minutes for another bus!



Transit Riders on Security

Overall, TRUE members are quite pleased with security. Certainly, improvement in some areas would be appreciated. Mill Woods, Coliseum, Jasper Place, and Abbotsfield Transit Centres have been identified as problem areas, and downtown suffers from panhandlers.

As will be covered in the 24 hour transit highlight section, riders view such service as a positive to security by providing more eyes on the streets and a safe ride home. Similarly, security suffers at locations with few riders; boosting ridership would go some way to improving the situation. It is important to look at this aspect of security as well; transit riders deserve the security of full access to the community and reliable, efficient public transit.

Dan Duperron: I would not want their jobs. They have my total respect.

Kim Ferguson: Security is good, as far as I know, despite incidents in the past few years. I don't go to Mill Woods Transit Centre at night; I'd rather be at the dimmer, less served Lakewood Transit Centre because there is so much loitering at the Mill Woods station.

Jillian Frizell: I've never had any issues with security on the bus.

Brett Lambert: I for one have never felt my safety threatened on buses, on LRT, or at stations. I've never encountered incidents where others around me have been threatened. Overall, I've been happy with security.

Ian Weetman: An increased physical presence of security staff at trouble hotspots (Coliseum TC, Jasper Place TC, Abbotsfield TC) would help to encourage more people to take transit. Additional security cameras and panic buttons would also help.

Douglas Bearchell: More security is needed.

Kelsey Chegus: I always feel safe riding ETS and drivers are always very helpful.

Elizabeth Cytko: I haven't had any problems, but with gang crimes and groups of teens hanging around public areas occurring more frequently, it would help to have eyes on them.

Kathleen Corey: Focusing on the Transit Watch program is a distraction from what really matters, getting riders to their destination in the most efficient manner. Announcements reminding riders to report any suspicious activity feeds the public misconception that it is not safe to ride transit. The program takes after our fearful American neighbors.

Erin denHartigh: Never had much of a problem. Sometimes there are some weird people getting in your face, like panhandlers at the stops downtown (Commerce Place especially). I'd like to see a security guard stopping by there more often.



Transit Riders on Service Coverage

Through responses for the Shadow Report and at meetings or in conversation, transit riders constantly say that service is quite good to and within downtown, but drops significantly elsewhere. University of Alberta service is also quite good for those who are students. Both areas suffer from a lack of late night service, but this will be covered elsewhere in the report.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for service elsewhere in the city. As a product of better service to downtown, service between outlying areas or even inner-ring suburbs tends to suffer. Areas commonly associated with a high population of transit riders, such as Mill Woods, still struggle with off-peak service, especially internally. Due to the nature of development and service, frequencies are often low (hourly is not uncommon), routes are meandering, and service ends early. While such service is better than no service, it is insufficient and requires improvement. Since the current system is designed for low frequency service, a wholesale route redesign may be the best way to efficiently increase service.

Industrial areas are also commonly cited as receiving poor coverage. Often, these routes will run hourly or half-hourly service during weekday peak hours only, and are normally the only routes in the vicinity. Furthermore, these routes are often meandering and inefficient. Workers whose shifts do line up with service are further trapped at work during the day, meaning expensive cab rides may be necessary for those willing to risk the service.



Kelsey Chegus: There are definitely gaps in the service and it is not always convenient to ride the bus. Service to the airport would be very helpful.

Kathleen Corey: Downtown is the best area for catching a bus that can take you somewhere. That somewhere might not be the initial place you had in mind, but at least there are buses running!

Elizabeth Cytko: My area is decently covered since it's on the 1.

Erin denHartigh: Ugh, the 112 and 115 down 142 Street towards Laurier: bad, bad coverage down that way. I tend to just walk from Crestwood to Laurier because it's too much trouble to catch a bus, but then you get the 100 screaming past as an express.

Dan Duperron: The service coverage is excellent.

Christine Dyck: I don't live in Evergreen, but I know a lot of people who do and the 302 Evergreen has the worst schedule ever! It's like they can't have lives if they take the bus because it only runs once an hour until 10pm and doesn't even run during the day!

Kim Ferguson: You can't win in Mill Woods! It's a mess: that's the easiest way to describe it. It's not like I live in the newer areas waiting for service - I've taken the same route since 2003, and it's hasn't gotten any better. There's always a 6, 8, 61, 63, 68, 70, 71, from Downtown to get you back to Mill Woods, but from the main transfer centre on it could very well be another hour.

Jillian Frizell: Good coverage when travelling between major centres. Very poor service in industrial areas. Generally good at peak hours, but difficult to get into many areas in reasonable amounts of time at midday or late evening hours.

Brett Lambert: Downtown and university are very well-served by ETS. Big gaps are most definitely along outskirts or more industrial areas of the city (many of those only get peak-hour service - you can do better than that!).

Fraser Pick: Obviously the far areas of the city are under serviced but that can be expected with this magnitude of growth. It should be an ETS priority to get better service out to these areas in the coming years.

Navid Tabatabai: I would like to see more buses bike-rack equipped (8, 6, 3, etc.).

Crystal Wellman: Bus routes need to be expanded to many of the new housing neighborhoods appearing. There are many bus routes that go downtown and to the south end as far as Southgate mall. However, I find that there are few bus routes that go towards the north end of the city.

Dawn West: Industrial areas for shift workers could use better service.

Iraleigh Anderson: Generally good routes and service within all older areas of the city. I don't venture much into the suburbs.



Transit Riders on Service Frequencies

As previously noted, respondents were given nine topics to comment on. Of these nine, one was titled "Service Levels (hours of operation, frequencies, etc.)." This topic generated our longest and most detailed responses so far, and the responses to the "hours of operation" question were so overwhelming and unanimous that they were split off into the "2008 Highlight Issue: 24 Hour Transit" section. This section deals with frequencies.

In its discussion of the factors affecting choice riders, ENTRA observes that frequencies are important to choice riders and that a 10 minute headway is the threshold for the schedule becoming less important. While TRUE agrees that current frequencies are not reaching this level, from discussions from transit riders we would put the headway at closer to 5 minutes. At this level, connections are unimportant and short trips become much more practicable. The higher 10 minute headway is more reasonable for choice commuters travelling a long distance, as the wait is significantly shorter than the trip duration and the trip is practiced with such regularity that the everyday commuter will simply adjust their arrival time to shorten the overall trip length.

The same logic, unfortunately, does not apply as well to short and spontaneous trips. Short trips of 5 minutes by bus on a 10 minute frequency become uncompetitive with the automobile, which may be able to achieve the same total trip in only two or three minutes. Further, such trips begin to be uncompetitive with walking (and are already dramatically uncompetitive with biking), especially when the price of a ticket is included.

While discouraging short trips may be a valid policy decision, it dramatically decreases the ability of transit dependent riders to get around. One example is a significant impact on the ability of the transit rider to practice chained errand trips (less likely to be practicable by walking or biking) in the same way as an automobile driver would, especially when combined with routes which meander rather than following easily understood directions.

TRUE understands that in outlying areas it is difficult to provide this level of service; equally, late night service would likely not sustain this level. However, TRUE questions the utility of dozens of routes with few daily trips and peak service of only half-hour or hour with no off-peak or weekend service. Effective transit service requires much more frequent service, and TRUE recommends a target of 15 minute service for all peak hour service, and 30 minutes otherwise (including evenings and weekends). A route which cannot achieve this frequency will not attract enough riders and is a function of poor route choice or development practice, both which need to be improved and are covered elsewhere in the report.

By favouring direct routes over the current meandering pattern, the total number of routes can be decreased and the frequency of those routes increased. Increased frequency makes transfers easier, and while some trips may require a transfer, many trips currently require multiple transfers anyway. More direct, frequent service is needed for short and spontaneous trips, and if the system is to promote trips other than commuter movements this is an important point to consider.



Iraleigh Anderson: There needs to be more bus service on Whyte Avenue during busy periods, like Friday and Saturday evening. This might help to ease congestion on Whyte. Perhaps more 4 buses between Bonnie-Doon and the University and/or more 6 buses between the University and Downtown.

Douglas Bearchell: Longer, later, and more often. If I want to go to my parents' house on a weekend I would catch the 80, but it runs once an hour and only on weekdays. The 80 from Southgate to Capilano should run on weekends; Route 44/74 should run on Sundays.

Amanda Kali Rose Blaylock: I know you might be limited in people and buses, but the routes that only come every hour are painful, because if you miss your bus, you can't do anything about it. You'll be an hour late, which is unacceptable.

Kelsey Chegus: It seems that more people need to ride ETS in order to increase frequencies. More should be done to actively encourage people to ride.

Elizabeth Cytko: I wish there were more seats on the bus, instead of this calculation of "we make sure people are standing on the bus." Can't we get double deckers or something?

Erin denHartigh: Frequencies could use improving. The 116 is a rare joy; if only it came more often. If the 111 ran more often around 8:00 or down 149 Street I'd be a happy camper.

Dan Duperron: There is nothing wrong with the frequency of service.

Kim Ferguson: I live in Knottwood and take the 64, which has a stop about 5 minutes away from my house. That is, when it actually shows up on time, if at all. Too many times has the bus been 5 minutes early, 10 minutes late, or a no-show. If I miss it, I have to walk to the 65 stop about 15 minutes away and hope that I'm able to catch it. I have to carpool with my parents in the morning because I have to leave the house at 5:40am in order to get to an 8:00am class on time. The 6:45am is the next available bus that early in the morning, and it has gotten me to class late. When I was in high school I noticed that there's a 7:15am bus, a 7:30am, and then an 8:05am. Why isn't there a 7:45am? It makes no sense.

Isabelle Foord: If every bus ran every 15 minutes, it would be great. If I'm not running for the bus, I'm waiting for the bus.

Brett Lambert: The majority of routes need to be running more frequently than they are now. The routes that run once an hour should be changed to at least once every 30 minutes. Routes that run every 30 minutes need to be upped to 15 minutes, and routes that are every 15 minutes should probably run every 7-10 minutes.

Fraser Pick: The frequency of nearly every route could be greatly improved. People also don't want to wait for 30 minutes for a bus in January.

Dawn West: Buses should run no less than every 30 minutes: if a route is inconvenient, the patron will find another way. Build up your system, don't hack away at it. Also, frequent service reduces security risks: people are constantly in transit and more operators are present at transit centres.



Transit Riders on Shelters and Stations

A variety of comments on shelters and stations follow, but the main comment is that they are rather cold in the winter. Certainly, investing more in shelters would be one way to help with this, but improved frequencies and scheduling would also reduce waiting times – warm or not, waiting is waiting. While stations and transit centres serve important roles, they will continue to be underused when sited in the same out-of-the way locations. Instead of forcing transfers, surround these points with higher density, mixed-use nodes and avoid bisecting the area with high automobile traffic roads. Park-and-ride surface lots are acceptable precursors to such development at outlying stations, but it is important to remember that these promote driving to the detriment of existing riders and that parkades will always be parkades.

Ian Weetman: Affordable housing and retail services at transit centres and LRT stations should be encouraged. Additionally, we need more enclosed and heated bus shelters and LRT stations, and to finish the roof on Coliseum station. We are a winter city, after all.

Douglas Bearchell: I see too many people smoking in the shelters, this needs policing. I smoke, but I stand a fair distance from the shelter

Kathleen Corey: Let's continue to build LRT stations above ground. It's less expensive, less work, and if it takes up some car lanes, so much the better!

Elizabeth Cytko: For major transit centers, why not a little heat? Bus shelters, why insist on glass, why not use a sturdy plastic that vandals can't smash when they wish?

Erin denHartigh: All the stations could be improved by commissioning Edmonton artists to design pieces for them and also by better ventilation. I really like the Stadium station: it's impressively convenient and quick to get to sports events. The facilities are chilly in general, but that's expected. Shelters especially are often a mess, and I don't like to sit on the benches for fear of what's been there. The Coliseum LRT station is disgusting.

Dan Duperron: They are really bright and clean.

Kim Ferguson: Mill Woods is really shady, and not at all appealing. After school, it's a battleground between groups and schools, and it sucks to be caught in the cross-fire. When I broke my leg last year, I had to take the LRT a few times and was told to take the elevator in order to save my knee some pain. That only worked if the elevators were working. If they weren't well, I'd take the escalator, if it wasn't being repaired. Why leave University station free all summer and wait until the first week of class to start escalator maintenance?

Brett Lambert: There should be more bus shelters, transit centres, and LRT stations. South Edmonton Common would be a good example; why there aren't more buses running around there is beyond me. During winter, transit centres need better heating.



Transit Riders on Transit in Other Cities

Transit riders in Edmonton often use transit in other cities when they travel and some have an even greater knowledge of other systems by having lived there. European cities are often held up as an example, especially over car-dependent North America, but much can be learned from both continents. While each system is different, commonly cited advantages include extensive rail transit, frequent and effective bus service, and well-planned routes. Additionally, cost is usually comparable for a much more comprehensive service. Much of this is due to the inherent structure of the city, but this of course can be improved as well.

Simple details that other cities are using to great success are arrival information displays and schedule information tailored to a specific bus stop. Both dramatically improve rider experience by eliminating the uncertainty inherent in waiting for transit. Edmonton's expanding LRT system in particular could benefit from these simple technologies, especially given that loop detectors are already in place and stations are currently devoid of any useful schedule information. Busier bus stops would more easily justify screens, but it should be noted that they were observed even at a bus stop serving a single route, next arrival 26 minutes (midday service). Regardless, simple, cheap arrival schedules should be common.

Fraser Pick: Calgary has a better system with similar funding. Take notes.

Ian Weetman: Calgary and Ottawa seem light years ahead of Edmonton in terms of planning and routes. Either city can be crossed in 30 minutes, versus at least double that in Edmonton.

Dawn West: Vancouver, Seattle, and San Francisco have beautiful systems.

Iraleigh Anderson: The night bus in Toronto is well-planned and well-used. Also, it is cool that you can take animals on the bus in Toronto; this makes transit appealing to more people.

Douglas Bearchell: Transit in other cities seems to be a lot better than here.

Kelsey Chegus: I heard that Vancouver is doing some very innovative things to promote ridership on public transit. For example, they are providing a baggage delivery service from the airport so people can take transit more easily. How can Edmonton build on ideas like to this to be creative and innovative with public transit?

Kathleen Corey: Model after Toulouse in France; it's half the population of Edmonton, with a similarly sprawling metro area and a way better transit system. Don't say the French are expected to be advanced in mass public transportation; no excuses! The Albertan economy is booming, population-wise especially, and now is the time to set an example.

Elizabeth Cytko: I liked London. Trains got you where you wanted, and you never had to stand like a sardine on a bus.



Erin denHartigh: Other cities kind of trump ours a lot of the time. But that's okay, we're working on it! Let's make our transit more environmental and cultural and clean it up.

Dan Duperron: I used to live in Red Deer, Alberta and that city's transit system is not as good as Edmonton's. Their transfers are only good for the next bus and if you miss that one you have to pay the fare again. I totally disagree with that.

Kim Ferguson: Paris and Rome are great examples. Other Canadian cities have multi-line systems as well, and Edmonton should adopt that. While our population may be less than Paris or Rome, Edmonton has a thriving economy, and a multi-line system will not only increase jobs, but it will serve a greater amount of people. Paris and Rome had more problems that Edmonton would - older cities with historical monuments and buildings everywhere that they had to build around, but their systems serve tourists so much better; also something Edmonton needs to work on.

Brett Lambert: When I visit cities like New York, Chicago, and Washington DC, I see how much better their transit systems are compared to ours. Frankly, it makes me embarrassed. I know transit will definitely be better these next few years, but we have a lot more work ahead of us if ETS wants to be a desirable alternative to the car. Gas prices are high enough; we need more options.



Transit Riders on Increasing Ridership

TRUE believes that increased ridership is crucial for Edmonton's future. Not only does increased ridership generate revenue that fare increases cannot, and allow for service increases to benefit all riders, but it provides benefits to new riders and society as a whole. Through discussions, workshops, and meetings held since our April 2007 founding, TRUE has seen firsthand how transit can increase quality of life in many ways.

Taking transit (alone, or in combination with cycling and walking) increases an individual's direct interaction with their environment. Quality transit gives people convenient access to political, economic, and social activities throughout a city, access they may not otherwise have. It also helps to build stronger communities as people interact with each other, creating social and cultural networks for themselves and their families.

Effective transit ensures that all are able to affordably reach employment and public services, thereby allowing people to maintain their independence while reaching a variety of communities. Ultimately, transit affords mobility to those in need by initiating social justice for all via transportation that meets the needs of the public that utilizes it, not a select privileged group in society.

While providing such powerful social benefits, transit also “changes gear” towards an improved understanding of environmental and public health in those places where families live, work, and play. Increased ridership (accompanied by decreased car use) can significantly reduce pollution and health problems in urban communities.

As people become more environmentally conscious, and as increased fuel costs put more strain on Edmontonians, the need for transit is increasing drastically. Unfortunately, transit service in Edmonton has not kept up with those needs, and the status quo of continued road building remains. There is a strong resistance to changing attitudes about how we make our way from work to home to play.

As Avi Friedman wrote in the October 20, 2007, Edmonton Journal, “between 60 to 90 per cent of new road capacity is consumed by new driving within five years of the road’s opening.” Further, “we are spending five years of our lives driving and 100 hours a year stuck in traffic – time that could be spent with family members, for example.”

We believe that city councillors, city planners and administration, ETS administration, cultural centres, business districts, and community leagues would benefit from a large pool of source material that demonstrates how sustainable transportation improves quality of life. It is our goal to facilitate discussion and help these groups to work together, and we have operated as liaisons between various groups (including the above, Citizens for Better Transit, and the Edmonton Trolley Coalition), but have often faced much resistance.



TRUE believes that in order to effectively understand transit riders' needs and experiences, our Transit Experience Report form, or one like it, needs to be implemented extensively to reach a larger demographic of youth, students, workers, adults, and seniors of all genders and backgrounds. There has been resistance to such a system of information collection; at a meeting with ETS administration held February 19, 2008, we were informed that our qualitative approach to addressing customer needs is regarded as unimportant by administration in comparison to the professional team of researchers employed by the business. However, we believe that only by listening to the voices of all transit users and all environmentally conscious citizens, can we aspire to an urban life that does not operate solely like a profitable business.

ETS engages in sustainability initiatives, for instance, participating in Environment Week at various venues throughout the city. Still, car dependency in Edmonton continues to be high, and there is insufficient significant change. The responsibility, of course, does not lie solely with ETS to encourage a change in attitudes. It must be understood that an addiction to driving as strong as Edmonton's is very difficult to break. Public education campaigns should be widely implemented in order to reach not only a small privileged group of public transportation users, but also potential transit riders.

In order to successfully implement sustainable public transportation, it must be possible to interact fully with Edmonton while being completely transit dependent. Increasing the allocation of funding for public transit is necessary to achieve physical, mental, and community health. By meeting these needs, transit ridership will increase.

As transit riders indicate in their responses, the most effective way to boost ridership is to provide a service that is attractive. This means accepting lower revenue recovery in the short-term, increasing service well beyond that currently provided, and implementing a host of changes to the system, many of which are outlined in the previous sections.

Jillian Frizell: Ridership would increase if it was faster and simpler to get from one area to another on the bus. The main reason people give me for not riding the bus is the inconvenience of current transit service.

Sara Labots: Introduce an annual pass for adult riders.

Brett Lambert: Initiatives like the U-Pass are an excellent idea to promote ridership. I've heard of employers wanting to give their own type of "U-Pass" for their employees. I think stuff like this is a great idea. More than anything, an efficient transit system will be the best way to promote and increase ridership. Edmonton is a geographically big city, so the more reliable the service, the better.

Fraser Pick: A better system equals more ridership; you can't get the riders first and then expand the system.



Ian Weetman: Make transit free, make it fast, and make it comfortable. LRT has an appeal that buses will never offer, so we need to actively encourage the development of a truly city-wide LRT network: at least 100 km of route over the next 20 years or so.

Dawn West: Take pride in your system and provide the service! If you provide the service the system will promote itself. Simple.

Iraleigh Anderson: Build the city around a future where more people will be taking the bus. Stop the never-ending battle to fight traffic by expanding roads - let the traffic-jams encourage drivers to take the bus instead. Pay attention to the temporary construction work going on in different corners of the city and provide transit to the workers. Transit has to be adaptable and attractive to a labor force that would otherwise buy their own cars.

Douglas Bearchell: Cheaper fares, passes, and tickets will boost ridership.

Kelsey Chegus: Policies will have to be implemented to change people's behaviour to get them to choose public transit. I don't think a behaviour change will happen unless policies are changed because people generally have a negative view of taking public transit. People will have to be convinced that it is convenient.

Kathleen Corey: The Employee-E Transit Discount is a good idea, but present requirements will not significantly increase ridership. The discount requires at least 10 employees to sign onto a 6 month contract to ride transit. It's unlikely small companies will have the entire company ride or even half. Ridership is low to begin with, so only large firms benefit from this discount. Instead, set a minimum in terms of percentage, no higher than 20%.

Elizabeth Cytko: Make it more appealing. I'm sure a lot of people are turned off by the idea of standing up and being squashed like a sardine while desperately holding on for their lives while the bus goes up and down hills.

Erin denHartigh: Less advertising and more providing service. 24-hour service and more accessible fares, schedules, and stops. Transit needs to be user-friendly, that's the best kind of promotion you can go for.

Dan Duperron: I think new trolley buses are well overdue. They should keep the trolley power lines. That is part of Edmonton's history!

Kim Ferguson: To boost ridership, provide a multi-line LRT system with longer hours and a better frequency of route service. I know Mill Woods is only one community in Edmonton, but I doubt it is the only one suffering from lack of service. When bus drivers see me running down the street to try and catch the bus, they could slow down instead of speeding up. I've been in at least three buses where people have told the bus driver that someone is trying to catch up, and they have simply said that, "Another bus is on the way," when the next bus is a half an hour away.



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!"



Conclusion and Recommendations

A new ETS growth strategy provides an incredible opportunity to make a statement about what role transit will play in Edmonton's future. Now is the time to increase standards and to provide dramatically improved transit service. Not doing so risks further decades of the status quo of endless road-building, increased congestion, further suburban sprawl, and an even higher car-dependency.

With this in mind, TRUE agrees with the ENTRA report in many respects. Certainly, improved frequency and increased fleet numbers are needed, and routes need to be reassessed. At the same time, TRUE is concerned that the report does not go far enough in several specific areas.

TRUE believes that 24 hour transit should be included in the new growth strategy as a top priority. Transit service cannot be complete without overnight service, and is not reflective of the type of city Edmonton is trying to become. Edmonton belongs in the same class as Toronto and Montreal, not London and Hamilton. Poor late night service costs riders jobs and social opportunities, and these costs must be weighed against budget implications. A focus only on revenue and ridership numbers for the overnight is additionally unhelpful if it ignores increased ridership throughout the day as a result of this increased service.

TRUE is especially concerned with a continuing fixation on the revenue/cost ratio. This is an indicator of profitability, not on quality of service. Edmonton should be focusing on more productive measures of success, such as travel time, modal split, and factors related to the quality of the urban environment. Revenue cannot be successfully increased in the long-term by endlessly increasing fares without improved service, this will only lead to lower ridership and an associated drop in revenue. At the same time, TRUE recognizes the need for fares to keep pace with inflation, and recommends that fares be tied to the CPI. Any further increase would require justification to riders. TRUE also recommends against passing the full cost of fuel increase on to riders. Not only does this reduce the incentive for transit to be more efficient, but it reduces the number of drivers who will switch to avoid high prices. We need to focus on the costs to city residents and society as a whole, not to city administration.

While TRUE supports increased frequencies and route reassessment, we believe that the target headway for mainline routes during peak service should be 5 minutes, and that outside of the overnight period, the target headway for all routes should be 30 minutes, 15 during peak. A route which cannot support such service must be critically reassessed. If it is due to poor urban form, an effort must be made to make future development more transit-friendly. If it is due to overlapping and circuitous routes the network should be redesigned such that it can support these frequencies. This may require radical route redesign and an acceptance of transfers; however, current service often forces transfers anyway, and increased frequency will help mitigate the problem. Additionally, a properly implemented grid-like system should only require a single transfer. TRUE recommends that a complete reassessment of route patterns accompany the growth strategy.



With regards to ENTRA's capital investment recommendations, we agree wholeheartedly with the need for fleet expansion. Optimally, we would like to see even higher purchase numbers; however, we recognize that it is difficult to grow at such a pace. Instead, we would like to see these numbers as only the beginning of a decades-long expansion policy, accompanied by a thorough redesign of the existing route network. A capital policy based on growth requires a network equally based on growth and improved service, not a network designed to facilitate service reductions.

By implementing the above policies, TRUE believes that we can dramatically improve ridership, providing new riders and the city with countless benefits. Taking transit increases an individual's direct interaction with their environment, gives people convenient access to activities throughout a city, and helps to build stronger communities. Effective transit ensures that all are able to affordably reach employment and public services.

Now is a critical time for the future of transit in Edmonton. A growing environmental consciousness, rising fuel costs, and a desire for improved urban form combine with a city council committed to improved public transit. We believe city council is willing to fund and pass the necessary motions to make better transit a reality. We believe that ETS is willing to provide the service, given the means to do so. We strongly believe that Edmontonians are ready to take the service, if it is provided. We know TRUE members are.

