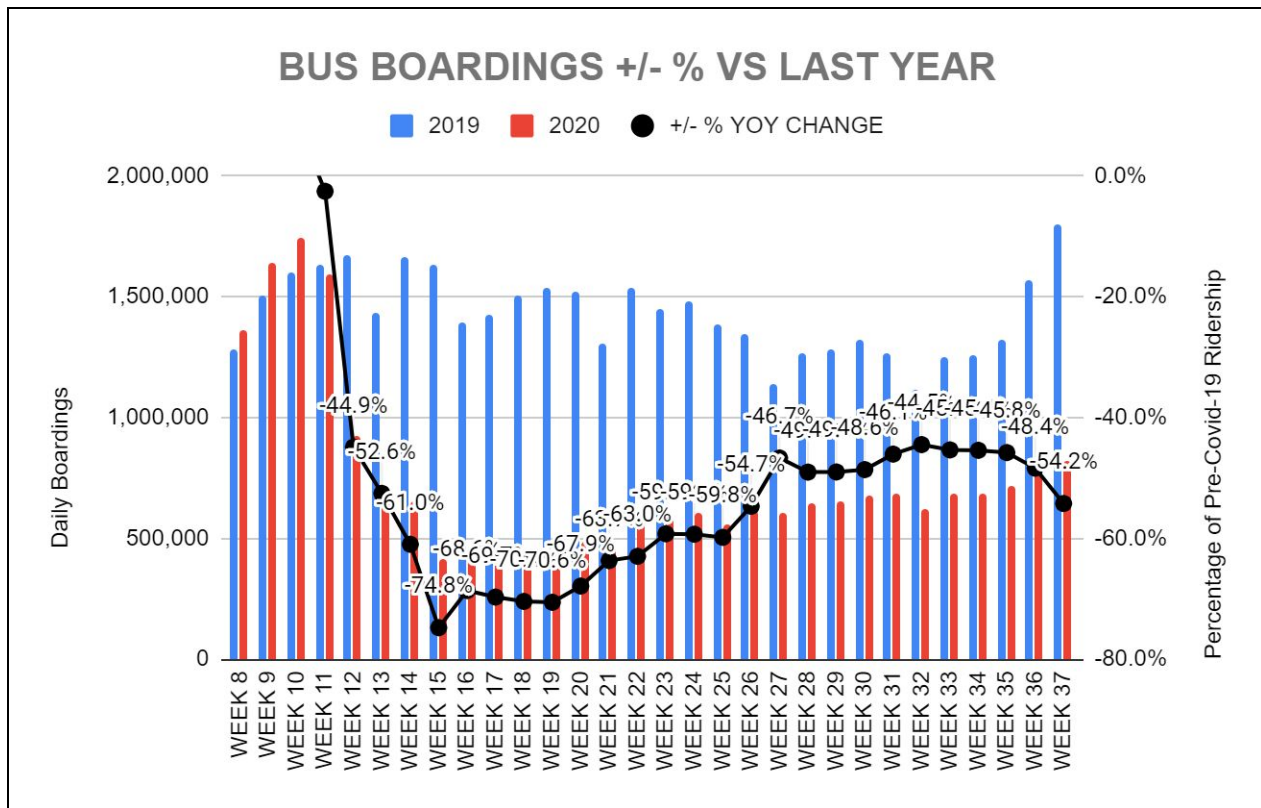


ETS Branch Highlights Report

Date: September 28, 2020

1. RIDERSHIP

Bus and LRT Ridership – April to August 2020



Note: Week 8: February 16 to February 22, 2020 - Week 37: September 6 - 12, 2020

ETS Ridership: Ridership continues to gradually increase with a return to regular service frequency. September typically sees major increases in ridership but it is lower than expected this year due to the ongoing pandemic, post-secondary institutions' continued focus on virtual learning, and many workplaces still have staff working remotely. Relative to other transit agencies in Canada, ETS participates in weekly CUTA calls to discuss COVID-19 impacts, tactics and strategies. ETS ridership, as of August, is performing in the upper third of ridership performance in Canada.

2. ETS UPDATES

Ride Transit Update

As most City facilities that usually assist in the distribution of Ride Transit passes remain closed, ETS reimagined how to sell Ride Transit fare products to reduce COVID-19 risks associated with in-person transactions. Reimagining how fare products can be sold and distributed will help future-proof revenue collection should a further wave of the pandemic take place.

Starting with October monthly passes, ETS has advanced plans for online payment, payment over the phone, and auto-debit of bank accounts, supported by a mailout process to receive the monthly passes. Those who still require an in-person payment option will be able to set up appointments to pay for and collect their pass at one of four city facilities. These options were added based on direct feedback from users and feedback was collected through an online survey of Ride Transit users, during discussions in 2018 with AISH users, as well as considering feedback collected from the Ride Transit program evaluation. The survey feedback indicated that users would benefit from a range of payment options, and online options did not pose a significant barrier to this customer group.

Overall, transit ridership has declined by half and monthly fare product sales are well below half of 2019 levels. It is anticipated that demand from this user group will also be low; however, as with previous pandemic response actions from ETS, performance will be monitored closely and actions may be adjusted to respond appropriately. As an example, if one sales channel is overwhelmed, additional resources may temporarily be added to relieve the congestion and ensure a smooth process for users.

Providing Accessible Transit Here (PATH) Program Update

When the PATH program was designed and approved by Council, it was intended to provide free transit passes to vulnerable Edmontonians who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. During COVID-19, Administration created an internal COVID-19 response task force to enhance support for these at-risk groups, including the provision of emergency services at the Expo Centre and associated transit supports. As a result of this work, ETS is increasing the number of monthly passes to be distributed by Citizen Services through its partnership with social services agencies from 600 passes per month to 1,000. This change will take effect with October passes. Administration will continue to monitor needs related to the program and will adjust as needed in the coming months.

City Plan Update

The City Plan has proceeded through two readings by City Council on September 16, 2020 as well as public hearings. The City Plan is being distributed for consideration by regional neighbours and then will return to City Council for a third reading before being adopted.

The City Plan charts out how we will get to a future city that has the benefits we enjoy today with new opportunities for the future. The Plan replaces “The Ways” documents and is the result of two years of public, Indigenous and stakeholder engagement and multiple technical studies, including cost of growth study, mass transit study, climate vulnerability study, and more. It

combines the Municipal Development Plan and Transportation Master Plan into a long-term vision that articulates the choices Edmontonians will make to become a healthy, urban, climate resilient city of two million that supports a prosperous region.

Additional information on the City Plan can be found [here](#).

Provincial Public Transit COVID-19 Guidelines

In response to COVID-19, the provincial government released [public transit guidelines](#) to support the public transit industry in Alberta in responding to the pandemic and in support of the health safety of riders and employees.

ETS is well aligned with the guidelines, including having the full bus fleet equipped with retractable Operator shields, implementing enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of transit fleet and facilities on a daily basis, and implementing a face coverings policy for transit. In addition, public communication materials are being implemented to promote the guidelines, including additional signage, posters and decals in transit centres and LRT stations, as well as ads on buses, trains, and in bus shelters.

Smart Fare Update

The Smart Fare launch is experiencing delays. Some of the delays are due to the pause of the installation of the card readers which were slated for March 2020 as the American firm returned to the US. An Edmonton-based firm has been brought onboard to resume the work as of September 2020. The current timeline for Smart Fare rollout depends on the timing of in-person pilot testing.

In the meantime, the City is currently testing the Smart Fare software in a lab to ensure its functionality will meet the needs of Edmontonians and regional travellers. Lab testing involves evaluating the tap functionality, the flow of funds through the system, and data management.

There has been discussion regarding interim measures to integrate credit card and debit payment into the current fare terminals but this is not a viable option at this point due to the staff and financial resources required.

ETS and Red Arrow Bus Partnership- Regional Travel Connection Hub

To support greater mobility in the region, starting September 17, Red Arrow will begin operating their 'Ebus' service from Bus Stop #1109, located on the east side of the Kingsway/RAH Transit Centre facing northbound. Ebus' service will not interfere with regular operations in and out of Kingsway/RAH Transit Centre. Red Arrow has an agreement with ETS to operate this stop to provide an additional regional travel option and greater connectivity for passengers heading to and from Edmonton. This is similar to the former agreement that was in place with Greyhound for this station.

Customer Research Update

During the Covid-19 pandemic, ETS had to put a halt to the on-going customer satisfaction survey that was due to launch in April 2020; the original planned approach included a shift in-person interviews throughout their transit journey. Instead ETS has pursued a mixed methodology

approach aimed at identifying customer perceptions around returning to transit, compliance with public health recommendations or bylaws, and the experience of those on transit.

The research has helped ETS reach a number of customer segments including those that have continued to ride transit throughout the pandemic, those that have returned after a hiatus, and those that have not returned, either due to a lack of need (ie. remote working), or because they do not feel comfortable or safe on transit. This customer segmentation is valuable for ETS as we communicate to customers and better understand their concerns and needs.

Covid-19: Public Transit and a Green, Inclusive Recovery

The Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) has released a new report about the future of transit in a post-pandemic world and the need to continue to fund public transit despite low ridership at the moment. The report, available [here](#), outlines a number of recommendations for municipalities and transit agencies to lead a path to recovery for transit agencies and imagine a low-carbon transportation future.

CUTA has also released [Covid-19 Guidance for the Public Transit Industry](#), a collection of industry best practices. The guidance document includes pragmatic recommendations for keeping transit safe transit Covid-19 pandemic, including physical distancing, cleaning, masks usage, etc.

ETS has been an active participant in supporting both pieces of work and through weekly transit system calls, discussing best practices for COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

Rail Safety Week 2020

Rail Safety Week started September 21 until September 27. An organization called Operation Lifesaver created Rail Safety Week in 2003 to raise public awareness of the potential dangers at highway/railway crossings and from trespassing on railway property. Since then, significant progress has been made in informing people and communities about incidents and fatalities related to dangerous behaviour around railway tracks. Safety measures include:

- Wait behind the yellow platform tiles at LRT stations
- Look both ways before crossing tracks at all train crossings. If you're wearing headphones, take them off so you can hear if any trains are coming.
- Wait behind the crossing gates until it raises. Even if you see a train already pass by, there could be a second train coming.
- Always remain a safe distance from the overhead wires that provide power for the LRT

ETS is taking this opportunity to help reinforce track safety procedures with maintenance crews, public and operators. ETS is also testing a new safety technology that provides advance warning to LRT operators and work crews of each other's presence.

On-Demand Transit Service Update

ETS has selected Pacific Western Transportation (PWT) and Via Transportation to launch Canada's largest On Demand Transit service. A total of 57 shuttle buses will connect residents in select neighbourhoods with a nearby transit hub. These accessible shuttles do not follow fixed routes and operate upon request. The On Demand Transit service will provide an additional layer

of service for our customers providing easier access to the larger transit system for the citizens of Edmonton. This service will help ETS recover and grow transit ridership, by connecting more people to our transit network.

The On Demand Transit service is set to launch in mid-2021, aligning with the launch of our Bus Network Redesign, and will be part of a two-year pilot project. Afterwards, the contracted service model will be evaluated and a public service model will be examined. Contracting the on demand service is the most efficient option to get residents the service they need when the Bus Network Redesign (BNR) takes effect in mid-2021.

PWT has popular On Demand Transit systems operating in Calgary, Cochrane, and Okotoks.

3. ETSAB INFORMATION REQUESTS

None

4. ETS COUNCIL REPORT TRACKING - 2020-21

SIRE	Report Title	Anticipated Meeting Date	Committee
7353	DATS Program Service Enhancements - Update and Next Steps	October 16	Exec
8036	Accessible Transit Voucher Pilot Program	October 16	Exec
7026	Current Policies - Transportation Services Users - Increased Safety Measures - Transportation Services Users	November 13	CPSC
7969	Transit Safety and Security Update	November 13	CPSC
7813	Transit Fare Fines	2021	CPSC
	Transit Tickets and No Fixed Address*	2021	CPSC

*Not an ETS lead report

AC = Audit Committee

CC = City Council

CPSC = Community and Public Services Committee

Exec = Executive Committee

IRCD = Inter-municipal and Regional Development Committee

UPC = Urban Planning Committee