

Comprehensive Report

City of Edmonton

Fare Policy Research and
Engagement



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Leger

We know Canadians

This comprehensive report outlines all aspects of the Fare Policy research and engagement completed by Leger on behalf of the City of Edmonton, specifically:

- Focus groups with transit users in Edmonton CMA
- DATS / AISH focus group and IDIs
- Online survey (and open link survey)
- Stakeholder engagement sessions

An executive summary is presented at the front of this report, highlighting the key takeaways from each phase of the research / engagement. The context, objectives, methodology, and detailed findings for each phase are reported in separate sections within.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

- For Edmontonians, transit is both a public good and an essential service. As such, both as users and taxpayers, they recognize that the burden of funding transit services should be shared by everyone and that there needs to be a balance between the taxpayer-funded portion and the user-funded portion of fare box revenue. At the same time, Edmontonians recognize that giving some types of riders discounts is appropriate – with the general sense that everyone should have access to public transit, irrespective of their ability to pay.
- Within the proposed fare policy framework, the distinction between ‘policies’ and ‘programs’ is not always clear. Many of the policy concerns expressed by the public, riders and stakeholders are about transit access for Edmonton’s most vulnerable groups. Most of these concerns could be addressed via the current or enhanced fare programs.
- Although the fare policy framework implies that transit should be seen as part of the ‘competitive’ landscape, for most, transit is not seen as being comparable to any of the other cost-bearing modes (e.g. taxis and private vehicles) so using the costs of other modes (or changes to the cost of those modes) as the basis for setting fares may be fraught. In the context of transit as a public good and given that for many, using transit is not a choice, transit is not universally seen as being on par with other modes of transportation.
- The fare policies as drafted are occasionally confusing when viewed in isolation, however, many of the questions around the proposed policies are resolved and make much more sense in the context of the forthcoming Smart Fare technology.
- Generally, the Smart Fare concept works very well and is understandable (especially by Edmontonians who have experienced it in other cities), but it will still require a significant education campaign (and there needs to be an understanding that some users may not adapt well to the change). As well, there will need to be accommodations for DATS users specifically.

Executive Summary

- With Smart Fare clearly understood, there are opportunities to introduce a distance-based pricing calculation and a Min-Max fare. Distance-based pricing is a change that will require significant changes in attitudes among riders, as some perceive that certain users will be unfairly penalized due to having to travel long distances or more frequently. For many, 'zone' pricing makes more intuitive sense, since many users are familiar with this concept from other cities' transit systems. Which Min-Max fare option to move forward with is not clear.
- The benefits of fare-capping built into the Smart Fare technology address many of the concerns (e.g. penalizing frequent riders) arising from the policies.
- Having fares set as a fixed percentage of the adult fare makes logical sense. Likewise, tying together fare increases so all of the fare categories move in unison is also acceptable with an important caveat – fare increases for all groups must be accompanied by increases in the corresponding social assistance amounts.
- Edmontonians agree that there are some groups within society that should get discounts for using transit. Not surprisingly, into this category fall groups like seniors, low-income earners, and persons with disabilities, etc.
- On balance, Edmontonians tend to set the discounts for students, seniors, low income earners and youth into a fairly narrow range of between \$46 and \$56 per month for a pass. While setting all the discount fares at these levels would result in a significant increase in the adult monthly pass (to about \$118 per month) it does imply that there may be an opportunity to streamline the fare categories into just two groups – adults and all other groups. Again, there is the critically important caveat that there be fare programs in place for the vulnerable Edmontonians that could possible fall through the cracks.

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