

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION REPORT NO.

MEETING DATE: June 24, 2014

SUBJECT: BOARD ENQUIRY: EARLY CLOSING OF SUBWAY ON
FRIDAYS BEFORE SUMMER LONG WEEKENDS

INFORMATION ITEM

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board receive this report for information.

FUNDING

This report has no effect on the TTC's Capital or Operating Budgets.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of May 12, 2014, the TTC Board's Audit Committee, in the course of discussing the effects of summer work hours on transit demand, approved a motion directing TTC staff to report back to the June meeting of the TTC Board on the feasibility of starting subway closures earlier for summer long weekends, in light of the reduction in subway passenger traffic on Fridays of summer long weekends.

This report responds to that request.

DISCUSSION

The TTC's subways carry a huge volume of customers. As an example, Line 1 carries 27,000 passengers southbound from Bloor Station in the busiest hour of a typical weekday morning peak, and carries approximately 730,000 passengers over the course of a typical weekday. The TTC is undertaking significant infrastructure reinvestment and renewal of its subway system. Automatic Train Control, rail, track beds, switches and tunnels all require upgrading or maintenance to keep the system in a state of good repair. Some of this work necessitates the closure of the subway beyond the narrow maintenance window we are afforded each night after service ends. The TTC, therefore, uses weekends, in co-ordination with the City of Toronto, to close portions of the subway system to get this critical work completed.

On Fridays before long weekends in the summer, travel patterns change because some employees are allowed to leave work early ("summer hours") in order to be able to take maximum advantage of those weekends. TTC staff have only one count of subway ridership on a Friday preceding a long weekend and, although it is now dated (2007), it shows a pronounced reduction in passenger volumes in the afternoon peak period of almost 30%.

In contrast, a review of revenue-passenger volumes for Fridays preceding long summer weekends consistently shows system-wide total ridership being higher on those Fridays than on the other days of the week.

In order to determine if the pattern of reduced travel from office workers is true elsewhere, TTC staff contacted BIA's in the central area as well as destinations which are major traffic generators. Time did not permit all contacted organizations to respond with data in advance of the preparation of this report. However, a good indicator of the different patterns of demand associated with different commercial operations is the Toronto Eaton Centre, which is a major traffic generator on Line 1.

The Eaton Centre data are proprietary and cannot be presented in this report, but they show that customer volumes on Fridays before summer long weekends are higher than on Fridays before regular weekends, and that customer volumes on those Fridays reach their highest levels of the day starting in the early afternoon. The Entertainment District BIA reported that attendance at major venues in the Entertainment District is as high on Fridays before summer long weekends as it is on Fridays before regular weekends.

Notwithstanding this information, TTC staff prepared a service design to illustrate the alternate service requirements if Line 1 were closed on a Friday afternoon, between Union and Rosedale Stations only. The service design assumes a 30% reduction in passenger volumes compared to normal weekday afternoon peak period volumes, based on the pattern observed in the earlier-mentioned ridership count on a Friday before a summer long weekend. In order to accommodate this reduced volume of customers over just that short section of subway, using buses instead of the subway, it would be necessary to operate over 200 buses during the afternoon peak period.

Even with passenger volumes reduced because of summer hours, the TTC's subways still carry a very-high volume of customers. Closing the subway would result in increased, not decreased, operating costs. Additionally, the TTC does not have that number of buses available to provide a replacement service for the subway on weekdays. In light of the Board's enquiry about passenger volumes on Fridays before summer long weekends, TTC staff will be taking counts of passengers on Line 1 on Friday, June 27, 2014 (before the Canada Day long weekend), in order to have better data on ridership in these situations.

Given the various contradictory ridership information regarding Fridays before summer long weekends, the very-high volumes of customers carried on the subways even under reduced-demand circumstances, and the high cost of providing alternative bus service to replace the subway, there should be no action taken to close the subway earlier on Fridays before summer long weekends. If the forthcoming ridership count reveals information which would change this conclusion, TTC staff will report back to the Board.
