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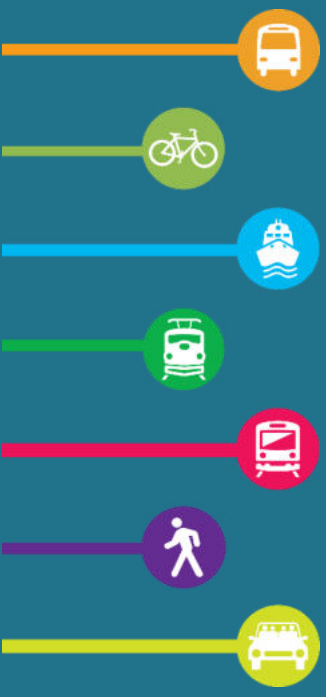

Prioritizing Safety on Public Transit

Recommendations for transit agencies, partnering organizations and all levels of government

Canadian Urban Transit Association

April 24, 2023

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With an increasing number of incidents of violence and harassment on public transit systems, CUTA recognizes the need for action to ensure the safety and security of transit riders and workers.

CUTA formed a Transit Safety Taskforce in June 2022 to address root causes of violence on transit and advocate for real-world solutions. The taskforce has finalized a set of recommendations for improving safety measures on transit systems, as well as engaging with all levels of government and partnering organizations to address broader societal issues that play out on public transit.

The taskforce and is composed of representatives from TransLink, Calgary Transit, Edmonton Transit Service, Winnipeg Transit, Toronto Transit Commission, York Region Transit and Société de transport de Montreal. These agencies are among the largest transit agencies in Canada and are experiencing the current increase in safety incidents most acutely. The taskforce was supported by Leading Mobility Consulting who is supporting several transit agencies with the development of transit safety plans and programs.

DEVELOPING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

CUTA acknowledges the working approaches of Canada's transit agencies to address safety on public transit. This document incorporates many of the approaches already in place, expands on them and endeavors to address broader contributing factors.

Public transit systems reflect the communities they serve. Issues, such as homelessness, substance use, and mental health, when left unaddressed, can impact transit systems. Addressing these broader concerns extends beyond the purview of transit agencies, and these recommendations reflect CUTA's call for all levels of government to come to the table with appropriate funding and other supports.

Recommendations are national in scope and not agency specific. They reflect common themes and do not delve into specific regional or local issues. The time scale and accountability for each recommendation are noted (immediate, intermediate-term: in the coming months, medium-term: 1-2 years, long-term: 2+ years).

FOCUS AREAS

Customer and Staff Safety	Substance Use	Housing and Supports	Mental Health
• Transit safety plans • Resourcing • Communications and technology • Infrastructure • Training	• Substance use in transit facilities • Connection to the opioid crisis	• Using transit as shelter space • Connection to the housing crisis	• Conduct and safety on transit • Partnership models with service providers

COLLABORATION

Given the multifaceted and broad-based nature of the factors contributing to incidents of violence on public transit, CUTA calls for an urgent meeting of federal and provincial representatives, including those representing transportation, public safety, healthcare, public health and justice. Additionally, CUTA calls on all levels of government as well as partnering organizations to participate in its Transit Safety Taskforce to work collaboratively on this critical issue.

RECOMENDATIONS

CUSTOMER SAFETY

#	RECOMMENDATION	TIMING	ACCOUNTABILITY
	TRANSIT SAFETY PLAN		
1	Transit agencies should develop a multidisciplinary and integrated Transit System Safety Plan that assesses the following: • Recent actions taken to improve transit safety • Desired outcomes and required resourcing (from the transit agency and involved partners) • Identified accountability for who is responsible for delivering on each program/initiative in the Transit Safety Plan • Safety bylaws, policies, and practices • Infrastructure that is currently in place • Gaps/opportunities/call to action to work with the province and community service providers to address complex societal considerations including mental health, substance use and housing, which are not the purview of the transit agency • Develop a protocol for involving equity-deserving groups in the development of transit safety initiatives and programs	Intermediate-term	Transit agency, in consultation with the municipality and other applicable partners
	MULTIDISCIPLINARY WORKING GROUP		
2	Multidisciplinary working groups should be formed. They can be led by the municipality, regional authorities, or the province and should be accountable for the following: • Developing and implementing strategies to support and respond to transit safety challenges • Developing programs and identifying resources (staff and funding) from the transit system, municipal departments (e.g. shelters and housing), the local health authority, emergency services, local community service providers and the province • Identifying who is accountable for the delivery of programs documented in the transit safety plan • Defining roles and responsibilities for partners, with reference to collective outcomes, procedures, rules, supports, enforcement (when applicable), reporting and evaluation measures	Intermediate-term	Transit agency with support from the municipality, regional authorities (if applicable) and the provincial government

	• Integrated data reporting from the transit agencies, social service providers and emergency services to inform program design and evaluation. Ensure occurrence reports include demographic information such as age, gender and ethnicity to better understand safety concerns towards vulnerable transit users. • Quarterly progress reports on the transit safety plan, with adjustments as needed based on lived experience, perspectives from front-line staff and data		
	RESOURCING		
3	Enhance staff visibility in the transit system	Immediate	Transit agency
4	Continue to invest in safety, security and enforcement positions	Immediate	Transit agency in consultation with municipal partners
5	Create multidisciplinary ad hoc project teams to address issues	Intermediate-term	Transit agency, municipality, community service partners, provincial government
6	Ensure regulations (e.g. bylaws) are in place to give special constables and/or the Police the ability to curb dangerous and unlawful behaviour on transit systems	Immediate	Municipality, provincial government
7	Explore partnerships to create multidisciplinary teams for outreach to vulnerable individuals with a harm-reduction, community-safety, and well-being approach. Outreach programs should focus on building relationships with vulnerable users to establish trust and more effectively deliver resources.	Intermediate-term	Transit agency, municipality, community service partners, provincial government
	COMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY		
8	Implement a continuous customer safety marketing campaign highlighting safety measures, informing customers how to report incidents, and communicating behaviours that are not tolerated in public spaces	Intermediate-term	Transit agency
9	Reduce barriers for customers to receive help with customer safety text messaging services and/or apps	Immediate	Transit agency
10	Introduce cell service throughout transit facilities including tunnels and underground stations	Medium-term	Transit agency, telecom providers
	INFRASTRUCTURE		
11	Enhance station cleaning and explore introducing in-service cleaning during the day for areas with continuous cleanliness issues	Immediate	Transit agency

12	Conduct Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) reviews of transit stations and facilities that are experiencing a heighten level of customer and employee safety concerns	Intermediate-term	Transit Agency

STAFF SAFETY

#	RECOMMENDATION	TIMING	ACCOUNTABILITY
13	Explore opportunities to introduce de-escalation training for front-line transit staff (e.g. operators, customer service, station maintenance, cleaners, etc.)	Immediate	Transit agency
14	Ensure that staff are aware of current transit safety initiatives provided by the transit system and community service partners (e.g. mental health outreach workers – if applicable). Ensure staff are up to date on Standard Operating Procedures related to customer and staff safety.	Immediate	Transit agency
15	Leverage Occupation Health and Safety committees, programs, hazard assessments and control measures to increase staff safety and address current and evolving trends	Intermediate-term	Transit agency, municipality, provincial government
16	The Government of Canada must strengthen penalties for assault of all transit workers by amending subsection 269.01 of the Criminal Code to include all transit workers, not just transit operators.	Medium-term	Federal government

HOUSING AND SUPPORTS

#	RECOMMENDATION	TIMING	ACCOUNTABILITY
17	Provincial and federal governments should develop a housing-first approach for individuals experiencing homelessness and related issues on transit systems	Intermediate-term	Provincial government, federal government
18	Provincial and federal governments should ensure the sustainability of new permanent supportive housing, including units developed through the federal government's rapid housing initiative, by working together to fund associated wraparound services.	Medium-term	Provincial government, federal government
19	Provincial governments should fund overnight access and intake to social service providers so that complex individuals requiring support can have 24-hours access to services	Immediate	Provincial government

20	Provincial governments should fund an extreme cold weather shuttle service from transit stations and terminals to local area shelters during non-revenue hours. Explore providing shuttle services to cooling centres during times of extreme heat.	Immediate	Provincial government
21	All levels of government should work together to fund daytime warming and cooling centres to reduce sheltering in place on transit systems	Immediate	Municipality, provincial government, federal government
22	Have transit agencies post crisis hotline and community outreach numbers and emergency shelter locations at key transit locations	Immediate	Transit agency

SUBSTANCE USE

#	RECOMMENDATION	TIMING	ACCOUNTABILITY
23	Depending on the jurisdiction, leverage established legal, enforcement and/or social support tools to prevent illicit drug use in transit stations, including diverting activity to alternate sites	Immediate	Provincial government
24	Provincial governments should create/enhance drug treatment programs	Medium-term	Provincial government

MENTAL HEALTH

#	RECOMMENDATION	TIMING	ACCOUNTABILITY
25	Explore partnerships with mental health service providers with outreach workers positioned within the transit system to assist transit staff	Immediate	Transit agency, mental health providers
26	Provincial governments should develop an accelerated handoff initiative between police officers/special constables and health professionals for individuals apprehended with mental health concerns	Immediate	Provincial government
27	Provincial governments should provide transit agencies with dedicated mental health outreach case management services for individuals with repeated mental health concerns	Medium-term	Provincial government

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