



**EDMONTON TRANSIT SERVICE**  
**ANNUAL**  
**SERVICE PLAN**

**2020/2021**



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# 1 INDIGENOUS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) acknowledges that our transit system, along with the entire transportation network, operates within the traditional land of Treaty 6 Territory and within the Métis homelands and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4. We acknowledge this land as the traditional territories of many First Nations such as the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot).

The City of Edmonton owes its strength and vibrancy to these lands and the diverse Indigenous peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory, as well as settlers from around the world who continue to be welcomed here and call Edmonton home.

Together we call upon all our collective honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.



## **2 INTRODUCTION**

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDMONTON TRANSIT MANAGEMENT TEAM

The year 2020, and start of 2021, have been like no other. Our lives have been completely changed by COVID-19. Never, ever, did we think we would be in the basement of Kathleen Andrews Transit Garage watching people put thousands of masks in boxes to distribute to Edmontonians. Never, ever, did we think we would look down at the grocery store and realize we were going the wrong way.

COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges to how we work, how we move and how we connect with our community. It has changed how people use transit and how ETS provides transit. It has changed how we clean our vehicles and transit centres. It has changed how we sell transit passes. Despite all of this, one thing has remained. Transit is an essential service that Edmontonians rely on.

The changes brought about by the pandemic have only strengthened our resolve to deliver safe and reliable transit for our passengers, and safe work environments for our Operators and transit support staff. The pandemic has further highlighted how critical public transit is for our community.

While we continue to follow Alberta Health Services' guidelines, including enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of our vehicles and facilities, we are also looking forward. We are approaching the launch of the Bus Network Redesign, On Demand Transit and regional Smart Fare projects. These are major modernization projects that will improve transit in Edmonton. We are also making great environmental strides, with one of Canada's

leading electric bus programs. As these major projects are delivered, they will contribute to the City's and region's economic prosperity, health, social well-being and inclusion, and climate resiliency by improving access to transit and improving the customer experience. Guided by The City Plan and ConnectEdmonton, a safe, fast, convenient, and reliable transit service is critical to enhance mobility, encourage a shift away from private automobiles, and recover from the pandemic. We are building an inclusive transit service that our city and region deserve and expect.

While there is no easy path to recover from COVID-19, our major modernization projects will set a new course in 2021. And for that, we're excited. Our singular goal – of improving the customer experience – has always been our north star. We're proud of the work we've accomplished together this year, and for the continued resilience our staff has shown during this historic time. Our employees deserve a heroic 'thank you' for all of the changes they have endured, the flexibility they have shown and the compassion they bring to their job each and every day.

Take care, and stay safe.

Carrie Hotton-MacDonald, (A) Branch Manager  
Ryan Birch, Director, Bus Operations  
Sarah Feldman, Director, Planning and Scheduling  
Cameron Grayson, Director, Transit Innovation Programs  
Craig McKeown, Director, LRT Operations and Maintenance  
Chris Ryan, (A) Director, Business Integration and Workforce Development  
Lukasz Wilk, Director, Technical Services



## What is an ASP? Why does it look different this year?

Each year, ETS releases an Annual Service Plan (ASP) that highlights past performance and upcoming projects for the year ahead. As 2020 brought new and unprecedented challenges, this year's Special Community Edition will highlight the hard work of staff to respond to the pandemic, the voices in our community that rely on public transit, and the exciting projects that will improve the customer experience in 2021.

Across the world, transit ridership has decreased drastically as COVID-19 altered our daily travel patterns. Edmonton was not unique in this regard, as many of us began working from home or ordering groceries online. These changes caused transit ridership, across the country, to drop as low as 25% of 2019 levels. However, throughout the pandemic, transit has continued to provide an essential lifeline to thousands of essential workers and those who continue to rely on transit as their primary means of transportation.



# **3 PUBLIC TRANSIT DURING A PANDEMIC**



## ETS RESPONSE

With an unprecedented situation like COVID-19, ETS responded quickly to mitigate safety risks for passengers and staff. ETS implemented, and has maintained, numerous effective mitigation measures to continue to deliver safe public transit for our community. In total, ETS has implemented over 30 different safety measures to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

As schools, daycares and workplaces closed, ETS shifted to a reduced transit schedule to protect the health of our Operator workforce and ensure sustained delivery of public transit over the span of the pandemic. ETS also implemented new innovative measures to enhance the frequency and intensity of cleaning and disinfecting across the transit network.

### CITY LEADER

#### Januaris A. Fleet and Facility Services

I'm originally from Toronto, and remember when H1N1 was spreading when I was in a frontline position. Fast forward to my role as a Bus Cleaner with the Fleet and Facility Services Branch at the City of Edmonton responding to the COVID-19 pandemic – we knew right away that this situation was going to need a serious response.

Working with management, we were able to get the PPE we needed to do our jobs safely with new challenges.

We have the responsibility to disinfect buses – for the health of the passengers, Operators, mechanics, and all staff behind the scenes. We spray, disinfect, and thoroughly clean each bus.

I know adults, children, lots of different folks are using the bus. A lot of my family takes transit to get to work and school. If my family is getting on the bus, we want to make sure that bus is as clean and safe as possible. ■



### Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting

When the pandemic began, the City quickly took stock of all the locations and services where Edmontonians and staff would be in closer proximity. This included public transit vehicles, transit centres, and LRT stations. Almost immediately, we began enhancing the frequency and intensity of our daily cleaning protocols for all in-service buses and trains, and frequent touch-points at transit facilities. Before any bus or train goes into service, it receives robust sanitization that uses unique electrostatic sprayers to “fog” the entire vehicle with a cleaning agent known to kill viruses and bacteria, including in hard-to-reach areas. In addition, all Transit Operators receive hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes to help keep their work environment clean and safe.

## CITY LEADER

### Patricia Jerome Fleet and Facility Services

We needed to respond immediately to the pandemic, which included enhanced cleaning of our trains. So, we more than doubled our cleaning staff by quickly redeploying City employees who were on temporary layoff or redeployed to our area.

We had to quickly train new staff, as well as order enhanced cleaning equipment that would help kill the virus. We knew all of this had to be expedited as quickly as possible. Occupational Health and Safety also provided us with a new COVID-19 cleaning procedure for trains. Cleaning processes that used to be done weekly, would now be completed daily. In the early part of the pandemic, the fear of the unknown was real, but by developing a plan, ordering extra safety equipment and ensuring staff were trained, we were prepared to meet this challenge head on. I am proud of our team for ensuring safe transit was available for essential trips. ■

## Fleet and facility considerations

ETS adjusted service schedules so all bus routes were, and continue to be, served by buses with Operator safety shields to provide a physical barrier between Operators and passengers. For local community routes, ETS deployed 40-foot buses, rather than our smaller 30-foot buses, to support increased physical distancing for Operators and customers. Furthermore, on our newer LRT trains (about two thirds of our LRT fleet), Operators began automatically opening the train doors at LRT stations, so passengers would not need to press a button to exit the train.



## Mask distribution

In summer 2020, on two occasions, ETS distributed free non-medical masks to Edmontonians at transit centres and LRT stations as part of the provincial government's mask distribution plan. In total, ETS distributed over **one million** masks to the public to help slow the spread of the virus. Since August 1, masks remain mandatory while taking transit and on ETS property. The vast majority of Edmontonians have been doing an excellent job at adhering to the rules and helping to keep each other safe and healthy. We truly appreciate your cooperation.

**COMMUNITY MEMBER**

**Christa P.**  
**Essential Worker,**  
**Royal Alexandra Hospital**

As an essential worker in environmental services at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, I need transit to get to work. When late night LRT schedules were adjusted, I needed another solution to get me to the hospital so I could work and ensure the hospital was cleaned to the new standards that COVID-19 demanded. Late night transit service for essential workers, operated by DATS, allowed me to get to work to do my essential job. It truly saved me. ■

## Late night shuttle service for essential workers

In April 2020, late night LRT service schedules were reduced so that cleaning crews would have more time to effectively sanitize and disinfect the trains. Ridership was also drastically lower during late night hours. In the absence of late night LRT service, alternative transit options through DATS were made available to essential late night workers with Alberta Health Services who relied on transit to get to and from work. DATS' late night service ensured essential workers were able to safely and efficiently get to work to care for patients, clean hospitals, and support AHS on the front lines of the pandemic.





## CITY LEADER

### Sarah Feldman Director, Planning and Scheduling, ETS

During the first few weeks of ETS' response to the pandemic, we made some major decisions in how we deliver service. These initial changes included shifting to Saturday schedules with extra service during peak periods, removing all 30-foot buses from service, and deploying all of the articulated 60-foot buses. These were critical decisions we made to protect our workforce, and the public, in order to ensure the long-term viability of service delivery.

Prior to the pandemic, we were already in the process of installing Operator safety shields on buses. However, when the pandemic began, we still had installations to complete, and did not have shields on enough buses to deliver a full weekday service. Switching to enhanced Saturday schedules, and removing 30-foot buses from service, put us in a position to have shields on all in-service buses. The enhanced Saturday schedules also meant we would operate a level of service that would continue to work even if we saw increased staff absences.

While it may have seemed like these changes happened with the flick of a switch, these changes were complex and required a real team effort across ETS. Sometimes it felt like the Planning and Scheduling team was in the eye of the storm during the immediate pandemic response, and we had to complete major work in a short timeframe.

To make the enhanced additions to Saturday schedules, the Planners had to identify enhancements quickly, and hand them over to Scheduling to create schedules and running boards. This was done in one day on March 17.

To manage the daily workforce requirements of Saturday schedules and relieve pressure on Dispatch, the Shift Designers created a new signup with rosters using Saturday schedules 7 days per week with the same workforce, and then ran a new signup process.

The team delivered so much detailed work in a short timeline to ensure transit was delivered to those who needed it the most. ■

## CITY LEADER

### Ryan Birch Director, Bus Operations, ETS

Transit runs 365 days a year, 7 days a week, and almost 24 hours a day. It's made possible by 1,800 Operators, dedicated Transit Inspectors, Dispatch team, mechanics and support staff. At the start of the pandemic, we began with a wholesale change in service levels on the street. This meant that Dispatch had to quickly scramble to ensure a Saturday level of service would be on the road with Operators assigned, while trying to balance work fairly. Everyone worked hard to make the service a success.

The world didn't know what we were dealing with and new information was making its way to us frequently – sometimes daily! At the onset, we decided to only use buses that were equipped with Operator safety shields. This was a great first step to have a physical barrier. Our partners in OH&S worked with us to review hazard assessments and ensure training material was available and applied across all work groups. We also added hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes – something that may not sound like much – but to obtain these items during a pandemic was not simple and required creative solutions. We worked hard and found supplies in bulk that required mixing and distribution across all garages. We temporarily suspended fares and had rear-door boarding while we worked to better understand the virus and its transmission. All transit vehicles, transit centres, and LRT stations began undergoing robust daily cleaning and disinfecting. This was a major undertaking, but again, necessary to help keep people safe. Today, we continue to focus on safety and work to keep staff informed about COVID-19, sharing information on active cases at our locations, and working with our union partners. ■

## Ride Transit Program sales

The Ride Transit Program, launched in 2017, provides greater access to public transit by reducing financial barriers for individuals and families in Edmonton. Through a partnership with the Government of Alberta, this program provides approximately 20,000 Adult and Youth monthly transit passes to eligible low income Edmontonians at a subsidized rate. It is a key Game Changer Action to end poverty as part of the EndPoverty Edmonton strategy. The program is delivered through a partnership with the Leisure Access Program in Community and Recreation Facilities.

To reduce COVID-19 risks associated with in-person sales, members of Administration, from many different departments, came together to plan and implement alternative payment methods, including paying online, by phone, through auto-debit, and by appointment at select recreation centres. Frontline staff have done an incredible job helping thousands of program participants purchase and receive their transit passes every month.



## COVID-19 IMPACTS ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on social challenges in our community, and highlights who has, and who does not have, access to safe spaces.

### Shuttle service

People experiencing homelessness face numerous barriers to stay safe during the pandemic, as they lack access to housing and other means to keep themselves separate from others. From April to the middle of June, the City, along with social services partners, established a shuttle service to provide a direct connection to access temporary shelters and 24/7 support. The shuttle service served the vulnerable population between the Edmonton EXPO Centre day program and overnight facilities downtown and at the Kinsmen Centre for those without a way to safely shelter in place.

### PATH passes

When the PATH program was designed, and approved by City Council, it was intended to provide free transit passes to vulnerable Edmontonians who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. Due to COVID-19, Administration created an internal 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 has increased the number of free monthly passes, to be distributed by Citizen Services through its partnership with social services agencies, from 600 transit passes per month to almost 2,000.

### Paratransit (DATS)

Our DATS Operators and contractors provide an essential door-to-door service for Edmontonians who cannot use regular transit for some or all of their travel needs, due to a physical or cognitive impairment. Many DATS clients also rely on the service for important medical appointments, like dialysis. ETS has taken special consideration of these circumstances and the needs of our staff. Therefore, all DATS vehicles undergo intense cleaning and disinfecting protocols on a daily basis and operational controls are in place to ensure every driver coming on shift is using a clean vehicle. Custodial staff are also doing daily cleaning and disinfecting of Percy Wickman Garage, including using the electrostatic sprayer. Our service planning has also adapted to ensure proper physical distancing between DATS riders. Everyone on DATS – Operators, clients and attendants – are required to wear a mask or face covering. This past year, DATS also took on the important role of operating ETS' late night shuttle service for essential workers with Alberta Health Services.

#### CITY LEADER

**Derek Bailey**  
**Transit Operator, ETS**  
*(volunteered for EXPO shuttle service)*



I felt it was my duty, to step forward, and help out with this shuttle service. When all of this is said and done, and when COVID-19 is finally over, I want to be able to look back and say, 'I did what I could do when I was asked'. It's up to all of us to help out where, and when, and if, we feel we can.

Everyone on board the bus is a human being, has a story and deserves dignity and respect. I'm grateful for the opportunity to help out, and I would do it again in a heartbeat. ■

## COMMUNITY MEMBER

### Rosemarie

I became a DATS client briefly in 2010, and again in 2019. Most trips were to and from work every weekday. I thank DATS for all the assistance I received.

The DATS drivers I have met are diverse. They come from so many different countries and circumstances (e.g.: Somalia, Czechoslovakia, the Philippines, people who have lived in Edmonton their whole lives, First Nations, Metis, people in their early 20s, seniors and most ages in between, with great variation in life experiences).

One theory states that it's only possible for a person to focus on one cognitive task at a time. DATS drivers must consider:

- the conditions of the road, sidewalk, stairs and ramps;
- the traffic;
- information on the computer and audio instructions from booking agents;
- time constraints, attempting to pick up every passenger within a half hour of their requested time;
- following DATS rules and regulations; and
- meeting the needs of each client, such as: pushing a wheelchair, providing a step stool, making sure a service dog has sufficient space in the vehicle, and helping a person with arthritis unlock the lobby door of an apartment building.

COVID-19 greatly increases the challenges faced by DATS drivers. They must help clients get in and out of wheelchairs, hold others by the arm and lean across some to fasten seat belts. Hearing and being heard is often problematic when everyone wears a mask. Vehicles must be wiped down after each passenger leaves.

I experience drivers offering amazing gifts such as: efficiency, effectiveness, outstanding driving skills, appreciation, fostering positive interaction among passengers, ability to teach clients ways of working with the driver as a team, patience, humour, spirituality, acceptance, philosophical insights, interesting life stories, musical talents, listening skills, understanding, caring, and empathy.

I think being a DATS driver is one of the most challenging occupations; for some, it is a vocation. As I reflect on this work, my appreciation grows. I wrote this letter so that other people can better understand the challenges DATS drivers face and ways they may brighten a client's day, and to express my gratitude. Thank you.

I've also had great experiences with brief telephone interactions from DATS booking agents. Thank you to the City of Edmonton's ETS DATS organization and the many people there who have enriched my life in various ways. ■



**CITY LEADER**

**Dan Duhamel**  
**Team Lead, DATS Operations Tech**

During spring 2020, information on restrictions and health guidance seemed to change on a daily basis. We were all gathering the best information possible to keep everyone safe.

When AHS initially announced limit restrictions and physical distancing restrictions, we updated our operations to only allow 1 client per trip. Running paratransit service in a pandemic was all new to us. We plan for contingency, but this was unlike anything we had ever experienced before. As work-from-home restrictions were recommended, staff in the garage were limited. The way we communicate with our teams, and management, changed and we had to adapt. I kept asking the same question: "How are we going to deliver paratransit service in a way that makes sense, do it quickly and keep everyone safe – from the mechanics, bus cleaners, Operators, clients, all DATS staff?"

For example, dialysis patients rely on DATS to safely get to their treatments. We take this role very seriously. We had to make sure there was a trip for them.

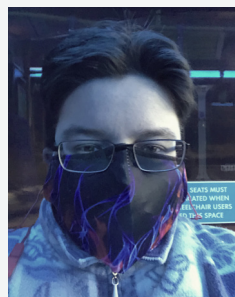
We adapted quickly and management relied on our team to ensure trips were delivered to people who needed them the most – our clients and then our city's essential workers after late night LRT hours were reduced. Our team truly stepped up and did a fabulous job of delivering service. I'm so proud of them. These folks, and all essential workers, are heroes in my book. ■



**COMMUNITY MEMBER**

**Allison L.**  
**Frontline Worker**

I'm a receptionist. I do a lot for my office and I use transit to get to and from there. I'm a permanent resident working on my citizenship. Transit helps me connect with my employment and helps me build a life here. ■





## ETS RELAUNCH

### Mandatory mask or face covering

On August 1, as the City of Edmonton moved towards relaunch and recovery, wearing a mask or face covering became mandatory indoors in publicly accessible areas of all City-owned and operated buildings, facilities, amenities and attractions, including while riding public transit and on ETS property.

On August 30, ETS also resumed regular bus service levels. Kindergarten to Grade 12 classes resumed in September, and restoring regular transit service supported families by providing an affordable transportation option for junior and senior high school students to get to school. LRT schedules were also restored to regular end of service hours, approximately 1:30 a.m., but operated on reduced frequencies throughout the day as a result of the Stadium LRT Station Redevelopment project.

COVID-19 also caused transit-related adjustments for many university students who typically use a U-Pass to access transit. Due to the majority of fall and winter classes being offered online, the City, along with regional transit partners and the participating post-secondary institutions, made a joint decision to not issue Fall or Winter U-passes in 2020/2021. A number of alternative discounted fare transit options were made available to post-secondary students, including access to discounted Youth fare products, as well as the Ride Transit Program for low income Edmontonians.

### Further COVID-19 protection measures 2021

In 2021, additional measures and tools will be introduced to further mitigate COVID-19 risks for customers and staff. ETS is working with TransitApp to provide real-time crowd-sourced bus load information. The tool will show how full a bus is, either in real-time or an estimate based on the past two weeks of ridership data. This functionality will help customers plan their trips using buses that are less busy, and have more capacity for increased physical distancing.



ETS is also partnering with an innovative local biotechnology company, Outbreaker Solutions, to pilot the installation of germ-killing push-plates on entrance and exit swing doors in select LRT stations and transit centres. The push-plates are made of highly compressed salt, and look and feel just like a ceramic tile. Salt naturally kills germs quickly and effectively. During the pilot project, push-plates will be installed on entrance and exit doors where people would need to push open the door to get through it. Unique and innovative projects like this continue to enhance the safety of public transit. This collaborative effort is at no cost to taxpayers.

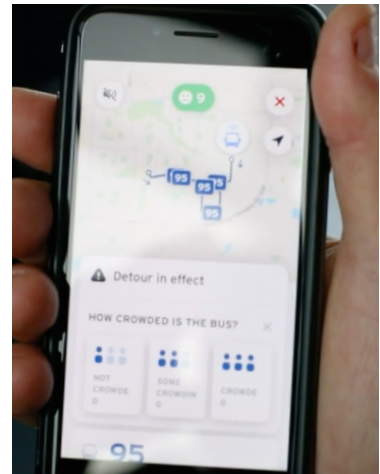
In addition, ETS will be replacing the seats on the newer fleet of LRT trains (approximately two thirds of the LRT fleet). The new seats will have an additional germ-killing agent within the seat that kills 99.9% of germs within a couple of hours. Installation is expected to occur throughout Q1 2021.

ETS will continue to prioritize safety measures, above all, and continue to look for innovative ways to further protect Edmontonians.

## CITY LEADER

**Lukasz Wilk**  
**Director, Technical Services, ETS**

In the early days of pandemic response planning, we had little information to make decisions that impacted how we provided transit in Edmonton. I am proud of the Technical Services team that provided information like passenger counts to make data-driven decisions that allowed us to pivot rapidly and find the right balance between Operator safety and the transit needs of our customers. We were able to make quick and agile changes to transit schedules and digital trip planning tools to ensure riders had the most accurate information during a very fast paced, uncertain reality. The team was critical in providing up-to-date digital communications on current AHS restrictions and safety guidance for passengers. ■



## COMMUNITY MEMBER

**Charles Kelly**  
**Chair, ETSAB**



The Edmonton Transit Service Advisory Board (ETSAB) is composed of twelve members appointed by City Council with the mandate to examine issues around the delivery of public transit in Edmonton.

Our focus is to look at the transit system and research methods by which it may be improved so that it remains a high level transportation option for Edmontonians.

Being dedicated to the concept of public transit, our members are frequent users of the service, some out of necessity as they have no other option for transit, and most because they find it convenient for their needs.

We find that using the bus or LRT to commute to work is a much more convenient and less expensive choice than driving as we can read, relax or even take a nap on the way home – not a convenience recommended for car drivers. In areas with a dedicated bus lane, we can glance

out the window and see the struggling line of cars as the bus passes them. As the system expands, we anticipate more such bus lanes in the future.

We enjoy observing the construction of the LRT system, as this fast-paced service will encourage more riders, resulting in fewer vehicles on the road thus reducing congestion, carbon emissions and collisions. We are also looking forward to the launch of the Bus Network Redesign which, unfortunately, was delayed due to the pandemic but is scheduled to launch in late April. We will see more frequent service on busy routes thus reducing the wait time and the crowding of buses at busy times. The introduction of electronic smart fare will also be an added convenience for passengers.

We applaud the manner in which ETS has managed the difficult COVID-19 disruption and how they have been able to continue providing an essential transportation service. ETSAB continues to support this endeavour with feedback and suggestions that will result in continuing to ensure a safe, inclusive service and demonstrating this to the community. ■



# **4 MODERNIZING OUR TRANSIT NETWORK**

## RECOVER AND REIMAGINE

Despite the pandemic, ETS has continued to make significant progress on a number of projects that will modernize our transit network in 2021. Throughout 2020, some of these projects faced COVID-19 related delays, while others were able to be accelerated due to lower traffic and ridership volume.



### Bus Network Redesign/ On Demand Transit launch

On April 25, 2021, Edmontonians will have a new and improved bus network. Based on community feedback from thousands of Edmontonians, the new bus network includes more direct routes, reduced overlap and some added evening and weekend service. The new design will improve schedule reliability and how fast people can reach their destinations. In conjunction with the launch of the new bus network, a two-year On Demand Transit pilot project will begin that offers a bookable service for select communities and locations. This on demand service will connect to the new network and provide public transit access to more Edmontonians.

In 2020 and 2021, crews will install or update more than 7,000 bus stop signs in preparation for the new bus network. The signs feature the new route numbering system which includes the final destination and ways to get real-time schedule updates for the next bus. The user-friendly signs incorporate universal accessibility standards so they can be seen by a wide range of people.

Coloured temporary wraps on the bus stop signs indicate how the routes will change and if a particular stop will open, close, or be replaced by On Demand Transit service.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have adjusted education and outreach plans for launching the new bus network and on demand service. Changes include enhancing digital communications strategies and reducing the emphasis on face-to-face outreach with citizens. The plan includes developing instructional videos for trip planning and understanding the new network. ETS is planning outreach that will be used in the weeks preceding, and immediately after, the April 25, 2021 launch.

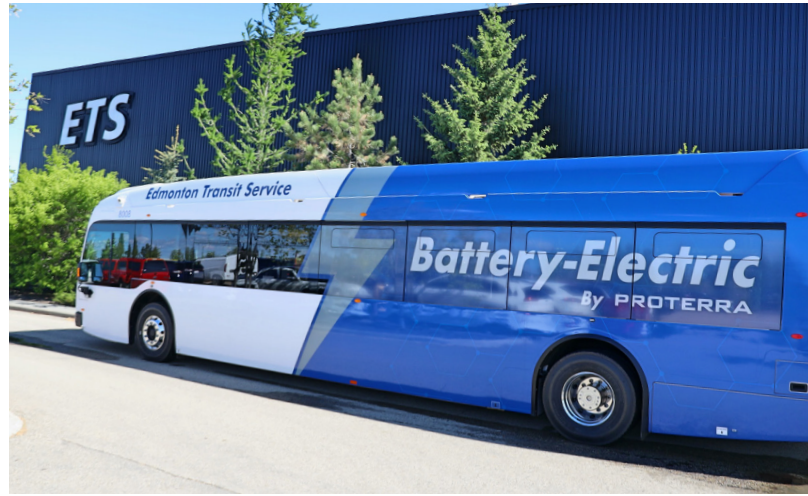
The new bus network and the launch of the two-year on demand pilot will give Edmontonians access to a more direct, more frequent, and better connected bus service. It is a key deliverable of the Transit Strategy, essential to support the mobility goals of The City Plan, and a key part of ETS' ongoing efforts to modernize public transit.

## Electric bus program

ETS continues to have one of Canada's leading electric bus programs, with the purchase of 40 electric buses – one of the single largest purchases in Canadian history. ETS deployed its first battery-electric buses into service in August 2020, and all 40 buses are now in service. This purchase is part of the City's commitment to integrate emerging technologies to create a more effective, efficient, and environmentally responsible transit service for Edmontonians.

ETS is also one of the first transit agencies in North America to have overhead pantograph chargers inside transit facilities. Multiple overhead chargers in transit garages, rather than single chargers on-route, greatly increase the redundancy of available chargers. This strategy ultimately increases the reliability of the service for customers. Overhead chargers also reduce the amount of floor space needed in the garage, compared to plug-in chargers, which reduces the size, and cost, of the garage. The electric buses take roughly one to four hours to recharge, depending on the level of charge when they return to the garage.

In February 2020, Kathleen Andrews Transit Garage officially opened. Currently equipped with 22 overhead chargers, this garage has become the main hub for electric buses in Edmonton. The deployment of electric



buses and the LEED Silver Kathleen Andrews Transit Garage are significant milestones in the City's efforts to operate a cleaner fleet, reduce operating costs, and modernize service with cutting-edge vehicle technology and infrastructure.

Electric buses are able to operate on just about every ETS route, and all buses come equipped with Operator safety shields. Electric buses are roughly 30% less expensive to service and maintain than current diesel buses, plus savings on the cost of fuel.

The electric buses are clean, quiet, winter compatible, have a range up to 350 kilometres on a single charge, and contribute to the City's shift toward more sustainable transportation, a lower carbon footprint, and high-quality transit service for Edmontonians.

### COMMUNITY MEMBER

**Ashley S.**  
**Edmonton-based Urban**  
**Planner and Sociologist**

Efficient and high quality public transit is foundational to building a more compact, sustainable and affordable city. In my work in the housing space, proximity to reliable and frequent transit is often cited as a means to reduce auto-dependence and live locally. Building an equitable, climate resilient city demands that we provide alternatives to personal car ownership so that people can meet all of their basic needs within 15 minutes from their home using active or public transit. ■



## Regional Smart Fare payment system

Despite some challenges from the pandemic, progress has continued to deliver Smart Fare, an account-based, electronic fare payment system that will make paying for transit easier and more convenient in the Edmonton region. Transit users in Edmonton, St. Albert, Strathcona County, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Spruce Grove, and Beaumont will all benefit from the same payment system and will provide better data to improve regional transit.

Smart Card readers that validate transit fares have been installed on St. Albert buses, Strathcona buses, and some ETS buses. Installation on ETS buses was paused in spring 2020 due to the pandemic, and restarted in October 2020. Once the Smart Card reader installations are complete, pilot participants will begin testing the “tap” capability of the system. This will occur by tapping their Smart Fare cards when entering and leaving a municipal bus or LRT station on routes they normally take, including commuter routes. This means the pilot participants will be able to ride any bus or LRT across the region.

This pilot will be conducted in Edmonton and the greater regional area including St. Albert, Strathcona, Spruce Grove, Leduc, and Beaumont. The work and findings from the pilot will allow a more seamless future roll out of the Smart Fare electronic payment system to all transit riders across the region.



## Regional Transit Services Commission

As cities and communities in the Edmonton Metropolitan Region continue to attract more people, demand for a connected and seamless public transit system will continue to grow.

At a local level, municipal transit providers face changing travel patterns and shifts in regional economies when planning, and forecasting, transit services. This is especially important when one considers that, since 2005, the number of automobile trips has increased by about 236,000, while trips on transit have only increased by about 9,000. That is one transit trip for every 26 automobile trips. Additionally, by 2065, the Edmonton region expects to see three million people with two million within Edmonton's boundaries, and one million in the surrounding region.

Given this forecast, regional transit delivery plays a vital role in supporting our economy and health of our community by offering greater workforce mobility and regional connectivity. Throughout 2020, the Regional Transit Services Commission (RTSC) Interim Board worked closely with the Government of Alberta, and, in early 2021, the Commission was legally formed. The Board is recruiting a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to lead the RTSC and deliver on bringing municipal transit services together for the benefit of the region.

## Safety and security framework

ETS is a leading transit agency in North America for using gender-based analysis (GBA+) in enhancing safety and security on transit. In 2021, ETS will be working directly with community partners on initiatives that will further enhance safety on transit, particularly for women and girls, as well as diverse communities to better understand root causes of safety concerns. Additional work will include the development and implementation of a bystander awareness program to help empower bystanders to identify and respond to harassment or sexual violence. This work follows recommendations from the UN Community Collaboration Committee delivering on the commitments made through the UN Women Global Initiative for Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces.

ETS is committed to further enhancing safety and security on transit using diverse perspectives based on approved Council direction in 2019. This framework includes an integrated and holistic approach that recognizes transit as part of our broader community and city. GBA+ will be applied to all work in the safety and security framework, including:

- Environmental design – how people interact with our facilities, roadways, and pathways during their transit journey
- Transit planning and network – how people access transit service, the location of our stops, as well as frequency of the service to support a safe journey
- Policies and procedures – including diverse voices into policy design and creating processes to address safety hazards
- Education and outreach – reviewing the training we provide to our employees, as well as marketing campaigns to citizens

- Technology and equipment – assessing the equipment on board our buses and trains, as well as surveillance cameras throughout the system
- Policing and security – integrating and data-sharing between various levels of security, including onsite security guards at transit centres, Transit Peace Officers, and Edmonton Police Service

Everyone should feel safe and secure on transit. This framework provides an avenue to enhance transit safety and security, while also supporting a safer community and city. This, in turn, will help drive ridership recovery and community connection.



## Transit Watch – text message service

In November 2020, based on community feedback, ETS launched a text message service for the existing Transit Watch program. This is part of our continuous improvement plan to further enhance safety and security on transit. This text message service allows transit riders to discreetly report safety and security concerns on transit, such as harassment, disorder and suspicious behaviour. Text messages are sent to the existing Transit Watch phone number, 780-442-4900, and the message goes directly to ETS staff in the Control Centre 24/7. The Control Centre will respond to the text message and dispatch appropriate resources, if required. All emergencies should still be reported by calling 9-1-1.

This text message service provides another layer of reporting that will help empower our riders to report concerns. More reporting also gives us valuable insight and data to help strategically deploy resources to the right place, at the right time.

### COMMUNITY MEMBER

#### **Bronwyn C. Relies on transit**

The LRT allows me to get to work safely and quickly. I work downtown and transit is my only option to get there, so the importance of it in my life is that it helps me put food on my table, and helps me pay rent. Before the pandemic I used it a lot more, for all of my travels in the city (but now I stay home except to work). Back then it connected me to work, my friends, shopping, and groceries. Transit will always be the heart of my life and I need it to survive. ■

## DATS customer improvement plan

DATS is in the process of implementing a three-year action plan to improve the client experience that was initially presented to City Council in June 2019. The report outlines the status of client improvement actions, which include:

- Implementing a more flexible and cost effective service model
- Addressing Operator workforce shortages due to excess retirements and unplanned staff absences
- Exploring partnerships with alternative transportation providers
- Pursuing technological enhancements in trip scheduling and real-time client information
- Leveraging the fully accessible conventional transit fleet
- Enhancing training for contracted operators
- Providing clients with an option to book either a pick-up, or drop-off, window
- Providing more flexibility to address individual client needs
- Improving the paratransit trip experience

Despite the impacts of COVID-19, the action plan is ahead of schedule and has added two additional tasks: a review and rebuild of the online booking tool, and an overhaul of the trip cancellation policies and enforcement program. ETS is focused on completing this action plan to improve the experience of DATS clients. Improving the DATS client experience is essential to our transit network and a key component of a healthy and resilient city.



## LRT expansion and station renewal

The Stadium LRT Station is 40 years old and, in 2020, the City began the process of renewing and retrofitting this station. This includes the addition of a side-load platform, which effectively creates two different platforms (one for each train direction). A side-load platform provides more space for customers, easier access to trains, and more efficient loading compared to a standard central middle platform that serves both train directions. There will also be two at-grade crossings on the north and south ends of the station. This renewal work will also include removal of the underground concourse and provide barrier-free access to the platform – creating improved customer safety and a more accessible station. This major renewal project is expected to be complete by early 2022.

## Valley Line Southeast LRT

The construction of the Valley Line Southeast LRT continued throughout 2020. The 13-kilometre urban-style, low-floor LRT will connect Downtown to Mill Woods and include 11 street-level stops and one elevated station. The Valley Line Southeast LRT includes construction of a new Davies Transit Centre below the elevated station, along with a 1,300 stall Park & Ride. Relocation of the Mill Woods Transit Centre is also part of the project. Furthermore, a Churchill Connector will create a direct vertical connection between the Churchill stop on the Valley Line and the existing Churchill Station on the Capital and Metro Lines. The Valley Line Southeast LRT is expected to be completed some time in 2021. A temporary replacement bus service will be provided until Valley Line Southeast LRT service is operational. As part of the new bus network, the replacement bus service will follow similar routing as the Valley Line Southeast LRT.

## Valley Line West LRT

In 2020, the City selected Marigold Infrastructure Partners to build the Valley Line West LRT and passed a provincial review that will clear the way for the \$1.47 billion funding agreement to be finalized between the Government of Alberta and the City of Edmonton. The Valley Line West is the second part of the 27-kilometre line that will stretch from Mill Woods in the southeast to Lewis Farms in the west.

Construction is slated to begin in 2021 and the extension will expand Edmonton's transportation network and help customers connect to public transit as Edmonton continues to grow.

## Customer improvements for 2020–2021

COVID-19 posed significant challenges in 2020 as ETS had to pivot quickly to implement safety measures and protocols. However, despite the sudden need to rethink how we imagine safety on transit, the core elements of the customer experience remained – safe, fast, convenient and reliable transit service.

In 2020, ETS continued to update technologies for improved route planning, launched a text message service to discreetly report safety and security concerns, and continued planning towards a Smart Fare payment system. This sets ETS up for some exciting changes in 2021, including, of course, the launch of the new Bus Network Redesign and On Demand Transit pilot on April 25. All said, we believe these major modernization projects will improve the customer experience for transit riders in Edmonton.

In 2021, cellular coverage will also be secured in LRT tunnels, enabling customers to connect to the cellular network and communicate on their mobile device during their commute.

## CITY LEADER

### **Craig McKeown** **Director, LRT Operations** **and Maintenance, ETS**

I remember the initial stages of this pandemic being a little overwhelming. There was a lot of confusion around what we could, and could not, do as the news unfolded. It was pretty incredible how our OH&S team worked non-stop to get clarification from Alberta Health Services while, at the same time, applying these new rules and restrictions to our work.

We were effectively being pulled in opposite directions, since keeping as many people as possible at home would help prevent the spread of the virus, yet we needed to provide an essential public service at the same time. Maintaining LRT service, even at a reduced frequency, requires a lot of operational expertise. It was intense working through what the service would look like, and who needed to be where in order to sustain that level of service, while sharing, communicating, and staying current on the ever-changing reality of the pandemic.

Like many families encountered, these constant changes were all on top of trying to figure out child care that suddenly closed, and what to do with our busy one year old. My wife works in a hospital and she continued to work and treat patients throughout, so understanding those risks and precautions was an added stress. Everyone has their own story. I know my situation is certainly not unique, and the life/work/health stressors had, and continues to have, a significant impact on everyone. I am incredibly appreciative for how the City has handled this pandemic and amazed by the flexibility of all of our staff. It's been an absolutely wild 2020 and I'm looking forward to one day putting this pandemic behind us – whatever that might look like. ■





# **5 CONCLUSION**

## We're all in this together

This past year has been challenging, to say the least, as we all had to adjust to new routines, new habits, and new ways of doing things. COVID-19 has required all of us to step up and work together to keep each other safe, while it also forced us to re-evaluate the way we do things and reflect on what is important. This is particularly true for public transit as it has truly laid bare the nature of this essential service. Whether it was ensuring essential workers could make it to work to provide their essential service or ensuring Edmontonians could continue to rely on public transit to get groceries, ETS has sought to provide a consistent service in an often rapidly changing world. Despite the pandemic, it stands to be true that the fundamentals of effective public transit remain. Edmontonians expect and deserve a service that is safe,

fast, convenient, and reliable. The path that ETS is taking to realize that goal may have changed, but the destination remains the same and we are more confident now than ever in that shared vision.

We are all in this together, and we want to say THANK YOU to everyone who came together and stepped up to meet the challenge – Operators, maintenance staff, customers, and countless others. This community version of our Annual Service Plan intends to highlight some of the stories that touched us throughout 2020, and will serve as a reminder of why strong public transit is essential. We also know there are many more who deserve our gratitude and appreciation. In 2020, people made the difference. Stay safe.



