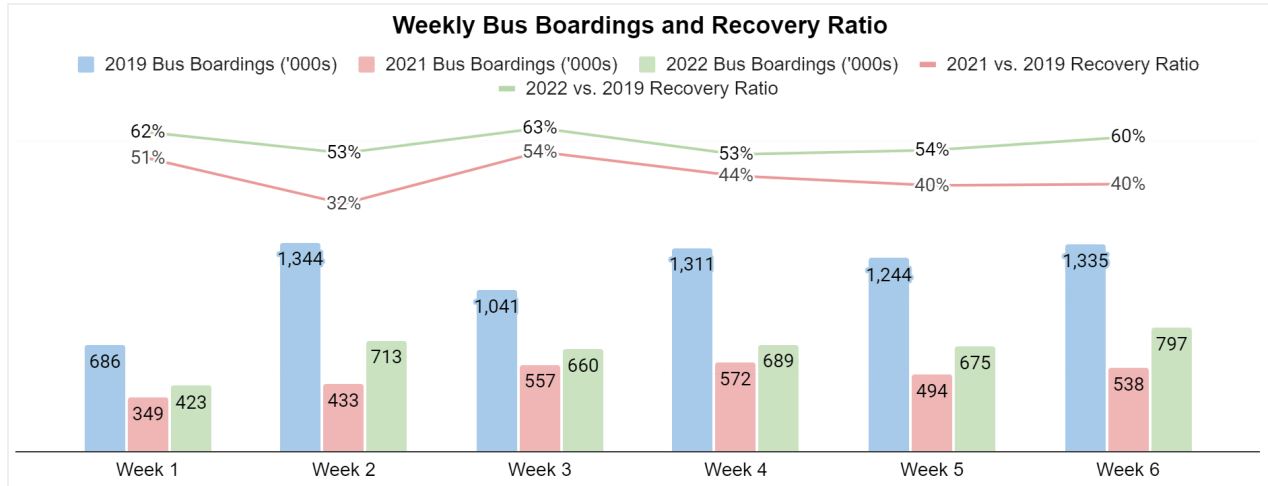


# ETS Branch Highlights Report

Date: February 28, 2022

## 1. RIDERSHIP



Note: Weekend ridership is not included.

\* Week 1: December 30, 2018 to January 5, 2019 / December 27, 2020 to January 2, 2021 / January 2, 2022 to January 8, 2022

\* Week 6: February 3, 2019 to February 9, 2019 / January 31, 2021 to February 6, 2021 / February 6, 2022 to February 12, 2022

Ridership reached 60% of 2019 levels during the first week of February 2022, up from 40% during the same week in 2021. This is the highest level of recovery since the start of the pandemic. Despite reaching peak levels in Omicron-driven COVID cases in January, the easing of public health restrictions and determination of businesses to get back to normal have allowed ridership to experience a modest increase in January 2022, from a weekly average of 52% in December 2021.

Effective February 8, 2022, the Government of Alberta lifted the Restrictions Exemption Program, while announcing a three-step plan to ease more COVID restrictions over the next couple of months. As workplaces have been planning their return-to-work policies, ridership is expected to continue on an upward trajectory in 2022.

## 2. ETS UPDATES

### **Safety and Security Update**

The effects of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic are far reaching and felt in many major municipalities. Public spaces, in particular in downtown areas, have seen shifts in their use - both in volume and activity. COVID-19 and related public health orders, including stay at home measures, have led to a decline in public transit demand for transit agencies across North America. These circumstances also create the conditions for an increase in criminal activity, often targeting those most at-risk. Taken together, these factors have contributed to transit riders feeling uneasy, and at times, unsafe. On February 24, City Council unanimously approved a safety and security plan that includes a three-year pilot program to expand the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT). This plan builds upon the previous work and foundational investments made in 2018 and will help further ensure a safe experience for transit riders and users of the downtown pedway system. The recommendations in the plan will also help vulnerable people in our community receive the support they need. The plan includes:

- Integrated and coordinated governance and operations for EPS, TPOs and other key partners, including crime prevention and response strategies
- More social supports, including expanding our Community Outreach Transit Team program with the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and more partnerships with stakeholders such as Alberta Health Services
- More frequent cleaning of LRT stations and transit centres
- Space activation in our LRT stations and transit centres to create more vibrancy and welcome people to our transit spaces

The City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Police Service and Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society will establish a leadership committee focusing on coordinated crime prevention strategies and targeted responses to criminal activity. The committee will implement a joint safety operations team under a unified, shared command and dispatch system that includes police officers, City peace officers, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society outreach workers and Fire Rescue Services.

The approved funding of \$3.9 million will be used over the pilot's duration to expand COTT by adding additional staff and increasing the presence of the team on transit. Administration will also be working with Alberta Health Services to ensure people have access to services beyond the scope of COTT, such as health care, addictions treatment, psychiatric services and other specialized care. Throughout the three-year pilot period, the City of Edmonton will gather feedback from diverse Edmontonians and organizations and continue to make improvements. This three-year plan strengthens and enhances the layered approach to transit safety and builds off the foundation established.

## **Bus Service Adjustments**

Starting February 6, 2022, ETS implemented bus service adjustments following review of rider feedback, schedules, service levels and routes. This review is done five times a year as part of ETS' commitment to provide the right amount of service at the right time.

ETS made service changes to 16 bus routes to reflect typical winter ridership patterns. The following routes experienced schedule changes: 4, 7, 8, 9, 107, 117, 120X, 121, 506, 684, 716, 719, 902, 924. Other changes included a bus stop added at 112 Street and Jasper Avenue for routes 900X and 940X. In addition, route 924 would no longer stop at the former Meadowlark Transit Centre. On Demand transit riders going to or from the communities of Henderson Estates and Falconer Heights are able to request service to and from the Leger Transit Centre

ETS continues to experience staff shortages as a direct impact of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. Therefore, short-term adjustments related to workforce impacts are still required. We are monitoring it very closely and are optimistic that we can resume normal service levels soon.

## **Silver Skate Festival ETS Shuttle**

The ETS Special Events service was put in place from February 12 to February 26 to support the Silver Skate Festival. Last year, over 75,000 Edmontonians visited the festival, and this year event organizers were expecting to see the same or greater number of visitors. ETS offered a free shuttle service to and from the festival on weekends (February 12-13 and 19-20) and on Family Day (February 21) at six different pick-up and drop-off locations, including University Transit Centre and University of Alberta Windsor Car Park. The free shuttle ran every 15 minutes from noon to 9:15pm. Average ridership for the Silver Skate Festival shuttle was at over 160 riders per day on weekends.

## **Metro Line LRT Extension to Castle Downs**

On February 15, 2022, Administration presented the updated Mass Transit Plan for a population of 1.25 million people. One outcome of the Council debate was a motion to include the Metro Line LRT expansion to Castle Downs as part of the 1.25 million horizon plan once funding becomes available, following the Capital Line South extension. Previously, the project was only included in the 1.5 million population horizon plan. The project will be completed in three phases. The first phase, which is fully funded and under construction, sees a new LRT station in Blatchford and the relocation of the NAIT station to its permanent location. Phase two involves building a new bridge over Yellowhead Trail and the CN Calder railway yard. The bridge was estimated to have a capital cost of over \$200 million. The last phase will include extending the Metro Line to Campbell Road. The announcement of this project has thus far received positive feedback from the public and media.

## **ETS Fleet and Storage Maintenance Facility**

ETS fleet storage, operations and maintenance facilities are operating at full capacity. Significant investment into new and expanded facilities will need to be considered in order to meet service demands and achieve emission targets by 2030. On February 15, 2022, Administration presented a report on the ETS Fleet and Storage Maintenance Facility Strategy to City Council. The Strategy

called for up to 440 electric buses to replace diesel buses by 2030. The Strategy also recommended the construction of two new operations and maintenance garages in the southeast and northwest quadrants of the city, enabling a fully electrified bus fleet. Additionally, progressive series of upgrades, renewals and expansion projects within existing facilities to accommodate growth, capacity and electrification were recommended. The Facility Strategy builds in adaptability in terms of accommodating different types of zero emission fleets. ETS is also exploring options to ensure cost effectiveness with adding two new garages.

**4. ETS COUNCIL REPORT TRACKING - 2022**

<b>Report #</b>	<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Expected Meeting Date</b>	<b>Committee</b>
EXT01055	Regional Transit Service Commission Update*	Mar 14, 2022	CC
CO00606 / CO00803	Bus Network Redesign - Options for Expansion / Bus Network Expansion Opportunities**	Mar 23, 2022	Exec
CO00607	Mass Transit System - Sustainable Funding and Service Growth	Mar 23, 2022	Exec
CO00778	Snow and Ice Control - Options to Increase Service Standards*	Apr 25, 2022	CPSC
CO00576	Transit Fare Fines - Repayment Options	Jun 13, 2022	CPSC

\*Not an ETS led report

\*\*ETS has requested that these reports be merged due to overlapping scope

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