

ETSAB: ETS' Marketing Strategy

Communicating Bus Network Redesign and Smart Fare Changes

Recommendation

That the February 25, 2020, Edmonton Transit Service Advisory Board report CR_7906, be received for information.

Executive Summary

The year 2020 will see significant changes to Edmonton's transit service with the launching of the new Bus Network Redesign and the introduction of Smart Fare. With such dramatic changes it is important that they be properly and clearly communicated to the public in order to effect as smooth and orderly a transition as possible and to ensure that people will be encouraged to use our public transit system. With this report, ETSAB is endeavouring to assist ETS Administration with suggestions of how these important changes can best be conveyed to both current users and potential future users.

Report

The subcommittee specifically investigated policies and operations covering these two questions:

- What are the best and most effective forms of communication?
- What messages need to be conveyed?

The subcommittee identified that current transit users use the following methods to navigate ETS, and therefore, need to be updated appropriately in preparation for the bus network redesign:

- Digital tools, such as apps, and webpages
- 311, Buslink Calling and Texting Service
- Paper Maps
- Speaking Directly to Bus Operators

In order to convey the changes, the subcommittee recommends using the following methods:

- City of Edmonton Postcards
- Engagement Sessions
- Information Desks

- Print Media
- Radio and Television
- Social Media Accounts
- Edmonton Public Library

In order to effectively convey the changes, the subcommittee recommends that answers to these key questions be included in all the messaging:

- Is my bus route changing?
- Is my bus stop still going to be there?
- How do I find out how the changes are going to affect me?
- How can I effectively compare the current bus routes and the new bus routes in real time, so I can predict my options and make plans for the future?
- How do I find out what bus to take?
- How much will my trip cost?

The recommended timeline is outlined as follows:

Date	Action
February to May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information in newspapers ● City of Edmonton Postcards ● Information on social media and on ETS and City of Edmonton websites ● Information available at EPL branches and other City Facilities
June to September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make available trip planning information for the new system on websites and mobile apps as well as on paper ● Provide information/education videos on YouTube. ● Promote the availability of these products via newspapers, radio/ ● TV, social media and websites. ● Conduct engagement/education sessions at community centres, summer festivals, and transit stations. ● Information signs on bus stops ● Try to appear on call-in shows.
From Mid-September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Direct marketing to non-users by promoting the 'new and improved transit system. ● Consider the possibility of a couple of fare-free days

Attachment

1. Report: ETS' Marketing Strategy

ETSAB: ETS' Marketing Strategy

Communicating Bus Network Redesign and Smart Fare Changes

Introduction

The year 2020 will see significant changes to Edmonton's transit service with the launching of the new bus network redesign and the introduction of Smart Fare. With such dramatic changes it is important that they be properly and clearly communicated to the public in order to effect as smooth and orderly a transition as possible, and to ensure that people will be encouraged to use our public transit system. With this report, ETSAB is endeavouring to assist ETS administration with suggestions of how these important changes can best be conveyed to both current users and potential future users.

Our assessment focuses essentially on two questions:

- What are the best and most effective forms of communication?
- What messages need to be conveyed?

A wide ranging number of Edmontonians were consulted, including some City Councillors, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, and a few other transit authorities within Canada, who had recently incorporated significant changes to their system to see what they felt worked for them. In addition to this, members of the sub-committee spoke with friends, coworkers, non-profit organizations that serve the community and neighbours about how they prefer to get such information and what they feel they need to know about the changes. During the final stages of our inquiries we also met with representatives of ETS Administration who are developing their marketing strategy and were pleased to find that they had arrived at many of the same conclusions that are present in this report.

Methods of Communication

1. Digital

It became quite clear during our inquiries that the vast majority of people get their information by digital means. When it comes to transit information, the most common method is use of mobile phone apps and, to a lesser degree, the ETS website. Social media apps are used for updates. While the widespread use of these media types is encouraging, we must remember that there are still many who do not use this method and rely on more traditional methods of seeking information.

ETSAB members also undertook an accessibility analysis of the ETS website, and were pleased to see that the vast majority of pages follow current web content accessibility guidelines. For example, the ETS website seems to:

- provide alternatives for non-text content, such as alternative text for images;
- have good contrast between text and background items;
- use proper markup techniques, not conflating form and content, thus enabling screen readers to render content as intended;
- accommodate a wide range of zoom levels, with content adapting to a smaller view port seamlessly; and

- accommodate keyboard-only navigation (which was established in cooperation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee).

However, while the current ETS website seems to be highly accessible, some older elements remain hyperlinked, or are shown as top search hits on google, that are not consistent with current ETS/*edmonton.ca* branding, or do not follow the design, and accessibility practices, and appear dated in comparison (refer to Fig. 1):

- a second version of the [ETS Trip Planner](http://etstrippanner.edmonton.ca/PlanYourTrip.aspx) (at <http://etstrippanner.edmonton.ca/PlanYourTrip.aspx>) including the route schedule viewer at <http://etstrippanner.edmonton.ca/RouteSchedule.aspx>);
- the [Virtual Tour](https://www.seevirtual360.com/themes/52/VirtualTour.aspx?listingID=10506) (<https://www.seevirtual360.com/themes/52/VirtualTour.aspx?listingID=10506>).

The screenshot shows the ETS Trip Planner website. The header includes the ETS logo, the title "ETS TRIP PLANNER", and the Edmonton logo. A navigation bar contains links for "Plan Your Trip", "Bus Stop Schedules", "Route Schedules", "Detours & Bus Stop Closures" (which is highlighted), "Subscribe for Alerts", "School Service", and "ETS".

The main content area is titled "Detours & Bus Stop Closures" and includes a search form with fields for "Your Route #" and "Your Bus Stop #", a text input for "Enter full Route number or LRT line", and a "Show Me" button. Below the search form, it says "Ongoing detours & closures for: All routes, all bus stops" and provides a "Print Detours" link.

A table displays the ongoing detours and closures:

DETOURS	ROUTE(S) AFFECTED	REASON	DESCRIPTION	START DATE	END DATE
Special Event: Kaleido Family Festival	5 , 8	Planned Detour	The total closure of 118 Avenue from east of 91 Street to w...	Sep 13, 2019	Sep 16, 2019
Special Event - Stadium Bus stop Closure - Eskimos Football Game	125	Planned Detour	Stadium Road closure is due to the Eskimo Football game at ...	Sep 07, 2019	Sep 07, 2019
Closure of EB Saskatchewan Drive East of 104 Street	52	Planned Detour	Bus Pad Installation	Sep 07, 2019	Sep 07, 2019
Closure of Mactaggart Drive North, East of Rabbit Hill Road	35 , 37	Planned Detour	Road Widening	Sep 03, 2019	Oct 19, 2019
Closure of Mactaggart Drive S East of Rabbit Hill Road	35	Planned Detour	Road Widening	Sep 03, 2019	Sep 04, 2019
Special Event 124 Street Farmers Market (SUNDAYS ONLY)	1 , 100	Planned Detour	Special Event: 124 Street Farmers Market RTE 100 and RTE 1...	Sep 01, 2019	Sep 29, 2019
Construction : Total Closure 124 Avenue (142 Street to 149 Street)	121	Planned Detour	Planned Detour Total Closure 124 Ave (142 St to 149 St)...	Sep 01, 2019	Sep 06, 2019

On the right side of the page, there are several utility links: "ETS Maps" (System Maps, Transit Centre Maps, Route Schedules & Maps), "ETS Trip Tools" (Buy Transit Online, Google Transit), and "General Service Alerts and Maintenance" (General Service Alerts, Elevator & Escalator Maintenance).

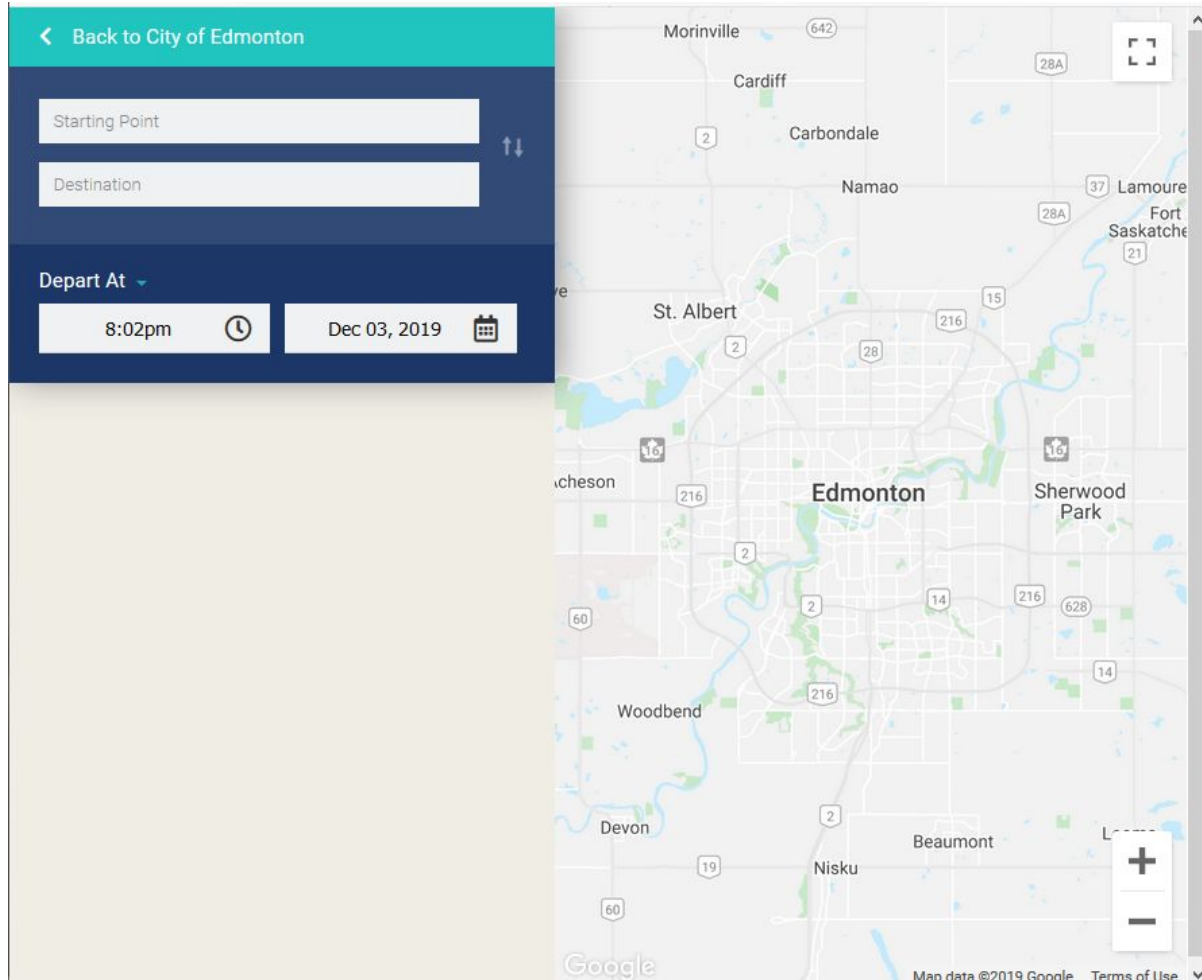


Figure 1: A comparison of the two ETS Trip Planner web pages. The first image is the older version <http://etstrippanner.edmonton.ca/> while the second image is the newer version <https://www.edmonton.ca/ets/ets-trip-planner-app.aspx>. Both are still active and can cause confusion.

Navigation on this older *Trip Planner* tool page (at <http://etstrippanner.edmonton.ca/>) does not work in the same way, or show navigational elements in the same location, as all other ETS/*edmonton.ca* pages. It may thus be confusing to users of the site, especially to those for whom inconsistency or change can be challenging, or who rely on screen readers or related technology that renders content differently than a visual web browser such as Chrome or Firefox. It was noted that the newer version of the *Trip Planner*, available at <https://www.edmonton.ca/ets/ets-trip-planner-app.aspx>, is not affected by this.

ETSAB recommends taking the older version of the *ETS Trip Planner* offline, or updating it so that it matches the current, modern *edmonton.ca* style and accessibility practices. Additionally, ETSAB generally recommends providing just one trip planner tool to passengers, as the availability of two different tools with the same name may be confusing.

Also, the *Virtual Tour* videos do not seem to come with either a static audio transcript or subtitles, which is not in keeping with current accessibility practices. Just as for the *Trip Planner* tool, the general layout and locations of navigational elements differ significantly from the rest of

the ETS website (see Fig. 2). While the current style, layout, and technology of the main ETS site, and the vast majority of its pages, seems to be highly compliant with current web content accessibility principles, ETSAB recommends ensuring that hyperlinked elements and resources are updated regularly according to current best practices, so that they may be accessible to as many users as possible.

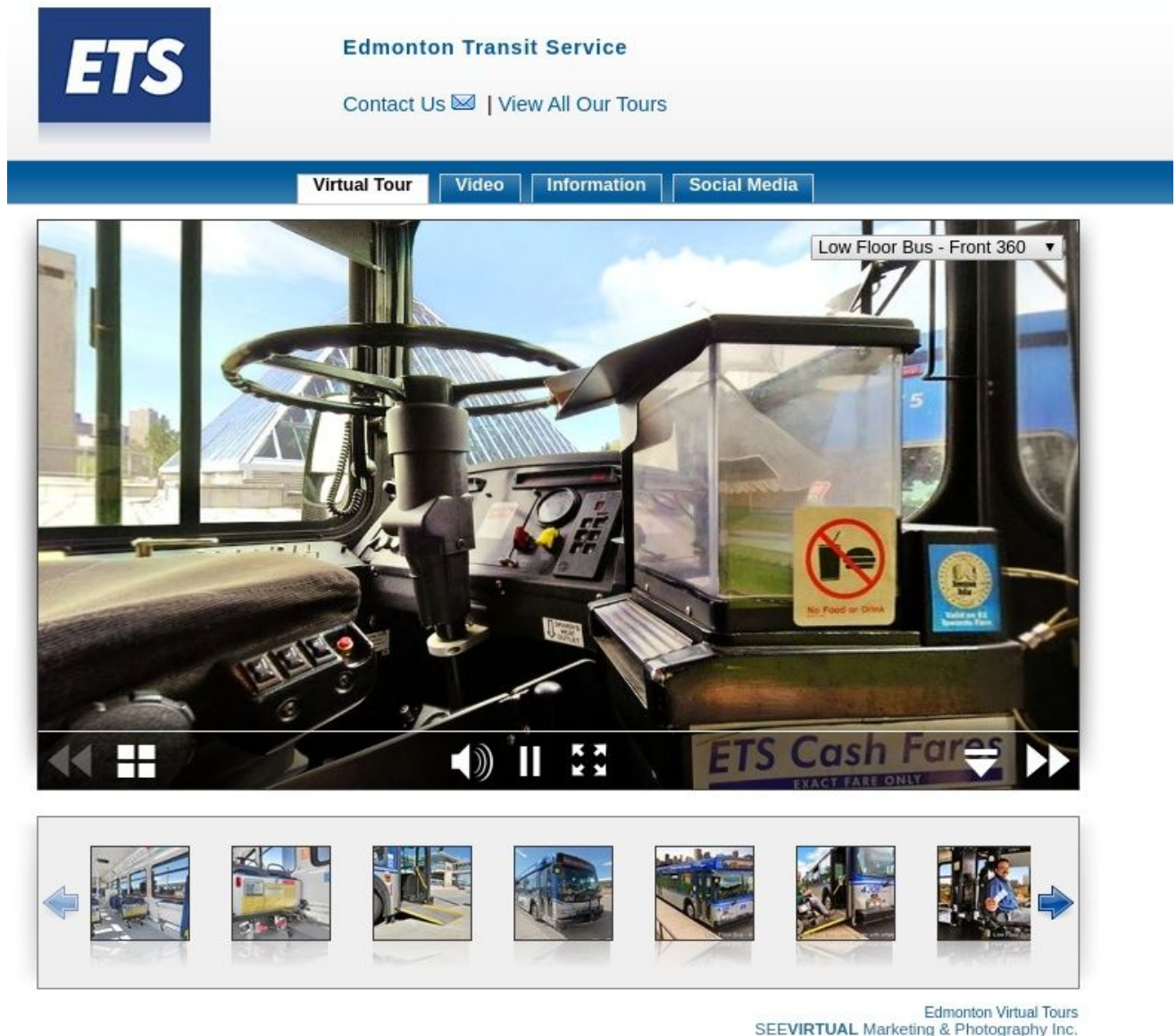


Figure 2: The Edmonton Transit Service Virtual Tour webpage, which provides information about transit vehicles and stations.

2. 311 calls, Buslink Calling and Texting Service

Many who do not use the above method continue to rely on phone calls to 311 for trip planning and other transit information. Many also utilize the *BusLink* Calling and Automated Texting Service to identify routes and departure times when at a specific bus stop.

3. Paper maps

We heard that there is still a considerable number of people who prefer to get route information and schedules from paper maps, particularly amongst older users of transit. It is important therefore that this type of product continues to be widely available under the new system. Paper maps are especially useful because they can be used to make data comparisons for historical purposes due to their static nature, and they also do not require a smart phone or a data connection, so that they may still be a preferred option for many.

4. Speaking Directly To Bus Operators

We heard that many transit users speak directly to the bus operators for help when taking transit. They either speak to the operators while buses are parked at a transit station, or on-route while the operator is driving the vehicle. The prompt, knowledgeable and friendly assistance of the operators gives many passengers confidence about their trip, particularly if passengers struggle with using digital or printed navigation tools.

5. City of Edmonton Postcards

We heard much praise for the postcards the City uses to deliver information to citizens' mailboxes. These are often used to let residents know about upcoming planning changes in their area, engagement sessions, or how to reach the City to provide input.

6. Engagement Sessions

This is another method the City already uses to good effect, although attendance often varies. Use of this method to explain and inform residents about the changes in the transit service would attract a good deal of attention, particularly if they were to be held close to the time of the change. Often people pay little attention until the changes are imminent. Such sessions could be useful to provide "hands on" demonstrations of the apps and website as well as provide written information for those who prefer that method (see Fig. 3 for an example from Grand River Transit).

May Service Education Days

Posted on Tuesday April 23, 2019

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Get to know your new GRT!

Join Grand River Transit for two service education days in May and learn more about ION, the EasyGO fare card, and how your transit experience will be changing.

Service education days will take place on May 3 and May 11 at the following ION stations:

Friday, May 3

- Research and Technology | 8 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.
- Allen | 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
- Central Station | 12 p.m. - 2 p.m.
- Mill | 2:30 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Saturday, May 11

- Conestoga | 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
- Laurier-Waterloo Park | 12 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.
- Victoria Park | 2 p.m. - 3:10 p.m.
- Kitchener Market | 3:30 p.m. - 5 p.m.

See you at the stations!

Related Links

Trip Tools

Plan My Trip

Look Up Schedule

Next Ride

Alerts

Figure 3: An announcement for an event to help educate transit users on transit network changes. Grand River Transit, Region of Waterloo, implemented significant changes to their transit network in July 2019.

7. Information desks

Use of information desks at main transit stations could be used to provide information similar to that of the engagement sessions. This method would be useful in that it would be reaching those who are current transit users and help to ensure they will continue their use of the system. Again, we believe that these sessions would be most effective in the month or so leading up to the changes and for about a week following the implementation.

8. Print media

It is common practice to place advertisements in the local newspapers, informing residents that there will be upcoming changes and where to get the detailed information about them. Similar notices could be placed in community league newspapers, reaching many residents at comparatively little cost. Consideration should also be given to the use of ethnic newspapers/newsletters. Not only would this provide the information to many who may depend on transit, but the editors of these publications may be able to translate the notice into their preferred language. Readers of these local newspapers are also more likely to disseminate the information to members of their community, increasing reach and awareness through word of mouth. We do however, recommend that ETS's marketing department that they provide the advertisement or articles already translated in the ethnic language. This is in order to have control of how the content is presented in these newspapers, and to ensure that the information is published in accordance to their established schedule.

9. Radio and television

Radio and television continue to be primary sources of information for many people and we have been informed by several media outlets that their personnel are generally willing to make themselves available when requested to do so. Invitations to attend information or engagement sessions could be forwarded to these outlets to good effect and they could be encouraged to provide information about the changes. Furthermore, Administration could make themselves available to be guests on radio or television shows and podcasts as another means of conveying information.

10. Social media accounts

Many residents of Edmonton use social media accounts to stay informed about current events and upcoming changes. Especially younger Edmontonians may primarily receive updates and information via social media, such as twitter, facebook, or instagram. Social media can thus be a beneficial tool in disseminating information, and official City of Edmonton social media accounts should post announcements frequently. This includes not only the social media pages of the City of Edmonton or the Edmonton Transit Service, but also those of other departments and elected officials.

Social media accounts of organizations and social causes should also be tapped into as a means of disseminating information. Examples are those of multicultural groups (ex. Pinoys in Edmonton, which has 11,000 followers), location-based groups or pages (ex. West Henday Community Page, North Side Hub) and community leaders with a large social media presence. Utilizing a variety of platforms to reach various demographics is valuable. These would be Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We suggest some thought be given to providing educational videos relating to the changes to be posted on YouTube.

11. Edmonton Public Library

We would hope that staff at EPL could be encouraged to help patrons in the use of the apps and websites for trip planning and other information, as well as having available the paper maps and schedules for those who prefer that method. It would also be valuable to have a digital transit departures board in each branch, similar to the one at the Bay/ Enterprise branch.

Messages that Need to be Conveyed

Most feedback we received indicates that the main questions on peoples' minds regarding the changes to transit and the fare structure are:

- Is my bus route changing?
- Is my bus stop still going to be there? If not, where is my new bus stop?
- How do I find out how the changes are going to affect me?
- How can I effectively compare the current bus routes and the new bus routes in real time, so I can predict my options and make plans for the future?
- How do I find out what bus to take?
- How much will my trip cost?

Prior to changes taking effect:

General information alerting users that significant changes will occur should be released with reassurances that specific information will be readily available at least two months prior to the implementation. This information can be conveyed by the use of the above mentioned methods.

In the two month period prior to the changes taking effect, it is important that as much information as possible is provided as clearly as possible to current users of the system. We would suggest therefore that;

- Maps and schedules for the new system be available online and through mobile apps, the ETS website and through videos at least a couple of months prior to the changes taking effect. Ideally, these trip planning tools should also display the cost of the trip prior to the smart fare being introduced.
- The transit app, for example, currently gives heads-up notifications when there is a system-wide issue or outage; it should be investigated whether this type of pop-up notification could be used to advise users of the new network.
- It is important also to include the ability to cross-compare the old and new routes side by side, to provide the opportunity to analyze the duration of the trip as well as the location of the bus stops at certain times of the day.

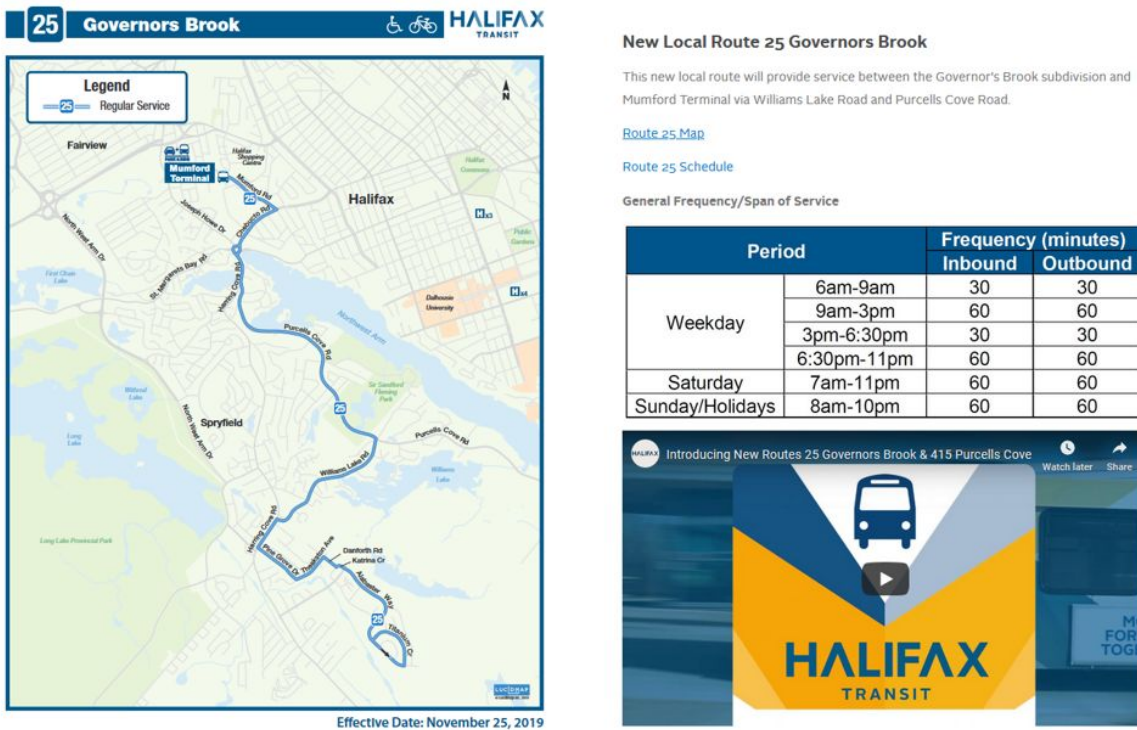


Figure 4: Halifax Transit implemented significant changes to their transit routes in November 2019. To help inform transit users of the changes, a schedule, map, and an online video is available on the website.

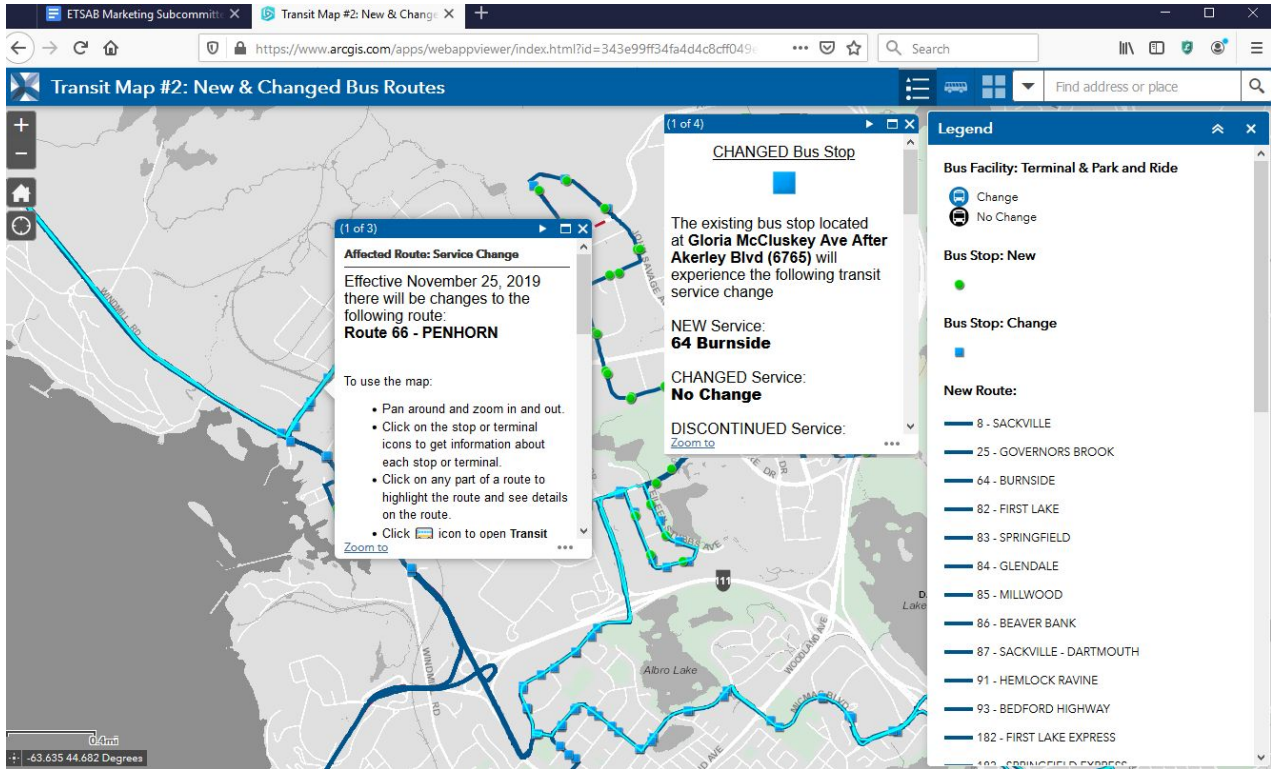


Figure 5: A screenshot of the interactive website that indicates the bus routes, as well as changes in bus stops, whether the bus stop is newly installed, a previously installed one with changes, or one that will be discontinued.

- Signs be posted at all current bus stops indicating how the users of that stop will be affected by the change. Will the stop continue to be available? If so, what will be the new route number and destination of the buses serving that stop? And if not, what are the best options to access the service from here?
- Engagement sessions be held at all major transit centres where information can be presented to current passengers including how to find information on digital platforms; as well as having paper schedules, maps and information available for those who prefer that method. Similar sessions could be arranged at community centres, seniors centres and other convenient community locations including many of the summer festivals in the City. A recommendation to capture the attention of transit users is to have a catchy element to the information desk. Ideas such as free coffee or doughnuts, or a fun mascot enthusiastically announcing that changes in bus routes are coming soon, can be a way to engage transit users.

Following Implementation

The above communication recommendations will most likely attract the attention of current users of the system and this, of course, is vitally important in an effort to maintain these customers. Once the new system is running we believe the marketing strategy should continue and be aimed particularly at recruiting new users. While the content of the messages will remain the same the emphasis should be on *“Check out our new, improved, more efficient transit*

system. *Have you tried it yet?*” type of approach. There may be value in advertising improved transfer times, frequencies, or trip durations for a particular trip on a personal story level, such as *“Thanks to the Bus Network Redesign, it now takes Jake seven minutes less to get to the rec centre.”*

It is important for bus operators to be able to confidently and consistently assist users regarding the new routes and navigating the new bus network. While the online and printed tools are available for transit users to educate themselves, the immediate point-of-contact for a passenger needing help is the bus Operator. Passengers who struggle with, or may not have access to the new tools, will rely on in-person assistance and will continue to do so until they are comfortable with the new network. Training, updated manuals, and supports for Operators will enable them to serve transit users who are adjusting to all the changes.

Some transit systems have provided a few days or a week of free transit following a major redesign of their system in an effort to attract current non-users. While we think this idea may well have some merit, we could well understand if Council may be reluctant to do this due to the current budget challenges.

Finally, it is important to uphold the principles of transparency, proactiveness and responsiveness in order to keep and maintain the trust of current and new transit users.

Timeline and Accessibility of Information

Date	Action
February to May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information in newspapers ● City of Edmonton Postcards ● Information on social media and on ETS and City of Edmonton websites ● Information available at EPL branches and other City Facilities
June to September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make available trip planning information for the new system on websites and mobile apps as well as on paper ● Provide information/education videos on YouTube including testimonials from passengers in other jurisdictions regarding the effectiveness of the on demand system. ● Promote the availability of these products via newspapers, radio/TV, social media and websites. ● Conduct engagement/education sessions at community centres, summer festivals, and transit stations. ● Information signs on bus stops ● Try to appear as a guest on radio call-in shows.
From Mid-September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Marketing directed at current non-users of transit by promoting the “new and improved” transit system. ● Consider the possibility of a couple of fare-free days

Previous ETSAB Reports to Consider as Additional Reference

ETSAB also would like to recommend a review of previously submitted reports that provided suggestions on improving transit user experience. By continuing to improve the delivery of transit services, users (both current and new) must trust the changes implemented by the Bus Network Redesign, which helps support the goal of increasing transit ridership:

1. CR_7309 (ETSAB Transit Communications, *A Scan of Three Cities*)
2. CR_6856 (ETSAB Wayfinding, *Improving the User Experience for Edmonton's Transit System*)
3. CR_4393 (ETSAB *The Edmonton Transit User Experience, Improvements to Consider for Implementation*)