Moving Towards Greater Justice:

A Community-Based Research Project on Transit Affordability in Toronto

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FOREWORD

Summary of the Report and the Project

This report reflects on a collaborative advocacy research project I undertook in partnership with the Fair Fare Coalition (FFC), a transit activist and advocacy organization in Toronto. The project is a community-based research project on transit affordability involving the participation of low-income Torontonians throughout the city. The purpose was to bring together voices that are usually excluded from official city planning discourses and decision-making processes to highlight some of the frequently unaccounted for "costs" of increasing transit fares in Toronto – for example, on individual and community health and well-being. Through this, the Fair Fare Coalition hoped to build capacity and mobilize knowledge towards advocating for policy measures to increase transit affordability in Toronto.

The participatory project's goals and outcomes are twofold. One goal is for the participatory process to culminate in a project deliverable that could be used for advocacy purposes in support of the Fair Fare Coalition's advocacy goals. The second goal is increasing community knowledge-building and mobilization, including ongoing political and advocacy actions. This is to highlight the fact that both the process and outcome are valuable and important.

For the purposes of this report, I will contextualize and situate the significance of the FFC project in Toronto, providing background, exploring relevant literature, and explaining the importance of the research methodology. I will then share brief findings from the research, and provide analysis of both the outcomes and process of the research project.

Plan of Study

Within my Plan of Study in MES, I have defined my Area of Concentration as "Planning and Education for Social and Environmental Justice." Through this, in a variety of ways, I have explored approaches and opportunities to move towards more just, equitable and sustainable urban development processes and outcomes.

My Major Research Project — *Moving Towards Greater Justice: A Community-Based Research Project on Transit Affordability in Toronto* — applies both planning and education thought and practice towards the injustices within Toronto's transit system's operation, focusing on both the distributive and procedural injustices of public transit in Toronto. Specifically, this project frames public transit as a social service, and focuses on affordability as a barrier to accessing public transit.

Learning Objectives

Environmental Justice

One of my primary learning objectives in my POS has been "understanding, studying, and working in support of current and local environmental justice issues in the GTA" (L.O. 1.2). Public transit is often overlooked in Toronto as a key site of social and environmental (in)justice, yet is an informative lens through which to view urban equity issues. Working on the ground with a community advocacy organization on these issues has been very enriching.

Education

My project has been pursued under community-based research and participatory action research frameworks – influenced by critical pedagogy – satisfying my POS's emphasis on "Education for Social Change and Community Development." I have been eager to "practice and hone educational pedagogies, methodologies and strategies to be used in pursuit of social change” (L.O. 2.2) and have created that opportunity by facilitating eight 90-minute long focus groups throughout the city intended to increase consciousness, build community capacity, and mobilize knowledge, making a space for it within the so-called expert knowledge of official urban decision-making processes.

Bringing together community members experiences and knowledge and reasserting it as valid and valuable – even if, and especially when, it is marginalized from official processes of decision-making – has been incredibly powerful. Utilizing an educational framework, this effort works towards greater public involvement in planning processes

Planning

In order to mobilize these efforts towards political advocacy efforts, I have needed to develop my understanding of “urban and social planning for just urban environments” (component 3). I have recognized that processes and outcomes of planning and development – in this case, with regard to transportation – are implicated in the production, reproduction, and continuance of these particular systems of power and inequity. Equitable processes are crucial in order to move towards more equitable planning outcomes, which is why my project attempts to facilitate making space for voices that have been disproportionately impacted, yet neglected, by official city planning discourses and decision-making when it comes to public transit. I have sought to gain a functional understanding of political processes and structures (LO 3.1) – which has been necessary in navigating advocacy work.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the project and report

This report analyses the role and significance of the Fair Fare Coalition (FFC) community-based research (CBR) project about transit affordability in Toronto. Although transit is currently a dominant topic of public debate in the city, this project sought to highlight voices and issues that are chronically missing – and are in fact marginalized – from these dominant discourses.

Ultimately, this project is about highlighting the social welfare and social justice dimensions of public transit in Toronto. While public transit performs a valuable and necessary social service, this aspect is not at the forefront of most transportation or transit-related public discourse or made a focus of decision-making on part of the City or the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). As a result, the social welfare function is not serviced well by the way in which the current system operates. While Toronto's transit system does offer social benefits, many residents are excluded from access to those benefits. This report and project emphasize barriers faced particularly on the basis of affordability of transit fares, faced especially by those who live on a low income.

A community-based research project about transit affordability in Toronto is significant in a number of ways:

Research process: Given that a great deal of municipal decision-making is expert-led – particularly with regard to a technical field such as transportation and transit planning – a community-based project focused on gathering, strengthening, and mobilizing community knowledge is a vital contribution. This research process has aimed to make space for voices and experiences that are usually marginalized from, but are heavily impacted by, official planning and decision-making processes – in this case, with regard to public transit operations in Toronto. When the official decision-making processes do not formally include evaluating the equity implications of public transit, the inequitable impacts are more heavily felt by many of the city's most vulnerable residents. The community-based research process aims to create a space for participants to share their experiences and, if they desire, to contribute to planning an event or action to attempt to bring more attention to voices and experiences that are frequently marginalized.

Conceptual and scholarship contribution: There is a dearth of literature addressing transit injustice in Toronto, particularly with regard to the equity implications of transit. This project brings together concerns of social welfare and public health with transportation planning under an experiential and participatory framework – a confluence which challenges the field of transportation planning not simply by introducing new data, but by also introducing and demonstrating the significance of methodologies and epistemologies that are not traditionally used in the field.

Research findings: The research findings of this project address and highlight current gaps in information with regard to transit usage in Toronto, as there is much information which is not currently tracked – for example, statistics on ridership in relation to income. By finding that transit fares pose a significant barrier to accessing transit for many participants, the project points to and explores ways in which the transit system could be made more financially accessible – while also making a strong and holistic case for why this is a necessary and urgent endeavor.

Description of the Project

The Fair Fare Coalition (FFC) is an advocacy organization concerned about the impact that the high cost of riding the TTC has on the physical health and economic, mental and emotional well-being of people in Toronto. The FFC was founded in 2010, in response to a significant transit fare hike in Toronto, and is primarily made up of members from various social service agencies or community organizations throughout the city, whether they are paid workers, volunteers, or clients.

The Fair Fare Coalition has been advocating for the following policy goals:

- The establishment of a low-income subsidized monthly transit pass;
- Free transit on extreme weather days, such as heat alert and cold alert days;
- A discount to agencies who bulk-buy tokens for free distribution.

As a follow up to its previous community-based research report, *No Fair Box: Comments from Toronto communities on TTC fare increases and services* (Shapiro, 2012) and in support of its established advocacy goals, the FFC sought to undertake another community-based research project. The intention of this project was to gather and mobilize community knowledge around transit fare costs in support of strategies, including the aforementioned goals, to increase affordability and therefore enhance financial access to transit services.

The research project was designed and carried out by a Research Sub-Committee of the Fair Fare Coalition, beginning in January 2014. The project is ongoing, and what is represented here is only a portion of the process and outcome of the project. One goal of the project is to produce a project deliverable in a collaborative and community-based manner – a process which has taken longer than the defined timelines of my MES program and therefore a more complete outcome cannot be included in this report. Another goal of the project is community knowledge and capacity building, and these community mobilization efforts will be ongoing until the policy goals are accomplished.

The research process seeks to address the following questions:

- Firstly: How are people who currently struggle with the rising costs of transit managing their daily lives and mobility? What are strategies that are being used to manage finances / the cost of transit? How much of a barrier to mobility does the cost of transit pose?

- Secondly: What steps could the TTC take to make transit more accessible and affordable – to increase access and mobility for people who struggle with transit's costs?

The community-based research activities thus far have involved facilitating focus groups sessions and administering a written questionnaire at various social service agencies throughout Toronto. Participants were residents of Toronto who earned a low income, according to Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off rate (LICO).[1] Eight 90-minute focus group sessions were held, with a total of 86 participants.

Relevant issues and themes

This project engages with several issues and themes, investigating the role of transit and examining the implications of its current operations in Toronto.

Transit as a social justice issue

While the social welfare function of transit is not adequately served and operationalized in Toronto, this project and report insist that transit is indeed a social justice issue. This report is grounded in an environmental justice framework, as I am concerned with the inequitable distribution of "benefits" and "burdens" that relate to transit's operation (Bullard, 1997). I will demonstrate that transit plays a significant role in social welfare by highlighting key concepts such as mobility, accessibility, social exclusion, and quality of life. While I argue that transit significantly contributes to social welfare, I will also demonstrate that the benefits of transit are inequitably distributed. The FFC project and this report focus on a particular barrier to accessing the benefits of transit: the cost of transit fares – a barrier which is more significant for those who live on a low income. Furthermore, the question and role of transit fares also brings to mind a

[1] According to Statistics Canada, the LICO for 2010 is $29,623.

related theme and issue: how the funding structure of transit demonstrates its perceived social role in a particular political environment.

Political-economy of transit

Transit fares are a form of user fee, and the existence of – and in Toronto's case, reliance on – rider fares conveys information about the role transit is seen to play. Although there is an argument to be made that transit is "merit good" (Litman, 2003) that should be available to all regardless of ability to pay, the influence of neoliberal governance at both the provincial and municipal levels has restricted the ability of Toronto's transit to perform in such a manner. Toronto's transit system has faced a significant decline in government subsidies over the past couple of decades, encouraging the transit system to run more as a marketized service than a social service. The dominant means of evaluating the role and contribution of transit prioritize the economic aspects above the social, which has presented an obstacle to meeting the social welfare needs served by transit in Toronto.

Transit decision-making and procedural injustice

Aside from transit service provision and outcome, I also look to how decision-making processes and procedural injustices are implicated in this outcome of exclusion and inequity. The decision-making processes are key when it comes to injustice in public transit, in particular, because transportation planning has been a traditionally technocratic field based on a "universal disembodied subject" (Hine & Mitchell, 2001) and it therefore poses particular and unique challenges as far as integrating community knowledge and involvement in decision-making processes and policy. But if we are to take seriously the social welfare aspects of transit and wish to enhance its equity, decision-making processes must make space for and integrate the experiences of those who have been most detrimentally impacted by the current injustices.

When the official decision-making processes do not formally include evaluating the equity implications of public transit operations, the inequitable impacts are more heavily felt by many of the city's most vulnerable residents.

HISTORY & CONTEXT

Public transit, as a vital city service that has significant impacts on the daily life of residents, is an informative lens through which to view both distributive and procedural injustices in Toronto. While the social welfare role of transit in Toronto may have gone overlooked in a great deal of transportation planning discourses, there are particular inequities in the distribution of transit benefits, with regard to service provision, and also in the exclusionary and narrowly-focused decision-making processes of transit planning that lead to inequitable outcomes.

Transit in Toronto

Toronto, as Canada's largest municipality, has the country's largest transit system, with service that spans 236 kilometres. It is the third most heavily used transit system in North America, with an expected 540 million riders in 2014 (TTC, 2013).

The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) is Toronto's sole transit provider. It has served as a public agency in Toronto since 1921, when it took over a network of mixed private and municipal street rail lines.

The TTC has been designated an "essential service" in Toronto since 2010 – a status protected by provincial Bill 150, *Toronto Transit Commission Labour Disputes Resolution Act, 2011*. This designation is, on one hand, a recognition that public transit serves a crucial function in the city and serves the "public interest" – a concept invoked in the legislature to defend transit's central and vital function. On the other hand, however, the purpose of this legislation is to prevent transit workers from striking and thereby disrupting transit service. This designation of "essential service" could therefore be heavily critiqued for reifying the neoliberal urbanist conditions of governance (Fanelli, 2014). For the purposes of this report, I will emphasize that the "essential service" designation of the TTC is not a declaration that public transit is a right and should be available and accessible to all.

In fact, in Canada, there is no legal recognition that mobility is a right nor any way to ensure universal access to transportation. Canada is the only G8 country without a National Transit Strategy (Canadian Urban Transit Association, 2007), which means there is no stable, dedicated, long-term funding from the federal government or an intergovernmental arrangement.

Funding the TTC

Toronto does not currently benefit from legislation or policy which addresses the equity dimensions of transit funding, unlike the United States which is served by federal legislation on the matter.[2] Only very recently – during the course of completing this report, in fact – and in an unprecedented move, Toronto City Council has considered implementing a policy framework for transit fare equity (City of Toronto, 2014).

The TTC is the City of Toronto's largest operating budget expenditure,[3] however, TTC operating costs are actually funded mainly by rider fares rather than government subsidy. The TTC has the highest "fare box recovery ratio" – the percentage of the operating budget that comes from fare revenue – of any major North American transit system, with over 70% of the operating budget coming directly from rider fares (Toronto Transit Commission, 2013) (see

[2] Transport Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)
[3] $1.6 billion in 2014, which was 17.7 per cent of the City's budget

Appendix A for comparison chart). This means the transit system is funded primarily by those who use it, and potentially need it, the most – a dynamic which calls to mind equity concerns.

This reliance on rider fares has not always been the case when it comes to funding the TTC. However, over the past couple of decades – due to the economic restructuring as a result of neoliberal governance at both the provincial and municipal levels (Boudreau, Keil, & Young, 2009) – the system has found itself with decreased government subsidy and therefore increased reliance on rider fares to fill this budgetary gap.

The TTC is obligated to balance its operating budget, as the municipality is legislatively prohibited from running an operating deficit. Furthermore, municipalities in Ontario have limited access to revenue tools with property tax generator of revenue to cover municipal expenditures (Slack, 2006). All of these factors have combined to contribute to a reliance on rider fares as the primary funding tool for transit operations.

However, even the TTC recognizes that this is an unsustainable state of affairs. As the system attracts more ridership, as it has been doing steadily, its operating costs increase. When the operating budget grows, there is greater need to fill the budgetary gap – and riders have faced successive years of fare hikes (see Appendix B). Fares have risen out of pace with the rate of inflation (Toronto Transit Commission, 2003, p. 41). Current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the TTC, Andy Byford, has stated: "we cannot keep asking our customers to pay more and more" (CBC News, 2014).

Government Subsidies

Provincial government contribution: The Ontario provincial government used to contribute about half of TTC's operating costs, until drastic cuts in the mid-1990s (see Appendix C). These cuts, which involved the "downloading" of many social service responsibilities onto the municipality, were part of the reigning Progressive Conservative government's neoliberal agenda which they termed the "Common Sense Revolution" (Boudreau, Keil, and Young, 2009).

Municipal government contribution: The municipal government contribution has declined or been frozen over the past several years while ridership has been continually increasing. In 2014, the city increased its contribution slightly. The subsidy-per-rider rate in Toronto is the lowest in North America, currently at about $0.80 in 2014 (TTC, 2013) (see Appendix C).

Fares

Fares are only one form of revenue tool that can be used to fund the operations of a transit system.[4] Transit fares are a form of user fee paid by riders in order to fund the operation of the transit service. Transit fares include cash fare payment, tokens, passes (day, monthly, weekly) at full or concessionary rates.

In the case of Toronto's public transit, an early incarnation in 1912 – called the Toronto Civic Railway, owned and operated by the City – contemplated whether or not to charge fares at all. According to a historical transit website, one councillor even stated, "We're here to serve the public, not to make money" (Bow, 2014). There is a contemporary movement for free transit in Toronto, currently led mainly by the Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly's (GTWA) "Free and Accessible Transit" campaign who aim to highlight the social service and social justice aspects of transit, claiming it should be available to all regardless of income (GTWA, 2012). They point to many examples of free public transit systems around the world, including the often-cited example of Talinn, Estonia. In Toronto, however, there has been increased enforcement of fare payment and criminalization of "fare evasion," (Kalinowski, 2011) with posters in TTC stations, stops, and vehicles declaring "fare is fair" (see Appendix D).

Transit fares do not serve equity well. "Transit fares are an extremely regressive revenue source" according to Mackenzie (2013, p. 28) from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in his study of the distributional impacts of different transit revenue sources. Because fares are

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[4] Other revenue tools that might fund transit operation have been contemplated for transit expansion projects (financing capital costs) – these include: sales tax, gas tax, road tolls, vehicle registration charges, land transfer tax, parking charges, development charges, and more.

a flat-fee regardless of income and capacity to pay, low-income riders pay a higher proportionate of their income per ride. Furthermore, given that low-income riders are more dependent on transit and use it more than their higher-income counterparts (Toronto Public Health, 2013), the TTC is disproportionately funded by the people who need it the most but have the least capacity to pay.

Fare discounts

While TTC fares are not entirely a flat fee, and there are fare discounts, there is no discounted fare rate offered on the basis of income. There are discounted "concession" rates (individual fare or passes, depending on the case) available for particular identified groups of people based on age (children and seniors) and student status (full-time secondary and post-secondary students who attend approved institutions) (TTC, "Fares," n.d.). Previously the TTC has dismissed the concerns of affordability for low-income riders as outside of their mandate (TTC 2003, 2013). Only very recently – in the summer of 2014, while I have been completing this report – has the TTC and City Council even considered implementing a policy that would recognize income and fare affordability as factors that impact transit accessibility (City of Toronto, 2014).

Financial accessibility of TTC

Fares are frequently increased when the TTC needs to increase its budget and 'affordability' has not seemed to be a guiding factor in decision-making on fare increases. The TTC and the City have not traditionally been concerned with financial accessibility of transit. Toronto has one of the least affordable transit passes in Canada, based on the cost of a monthly transit pass as a percentage of monthly minimum wage income (Toronto Public Health, 2013, p. 4). TTC fare increases have exceeded the rate of inflation (Toronto Transit Commission, 2003, p. 41) (See Appendix E). There is no standard established for what would represent an ‘affordable’ or ‘unaffordable’ fare, and without an established measure it is especially difficult to measure or evaluate the concept. While the TTC has acknowledged that fares may be unaffordable for some, it has dismissed the issue as outside of its mandate:

> Fifteen-to-twenty percent of regular TTC passengers do not have access to an automobile for their trip and are, therefore, highly dependent on the TTC for travel in Toronto. While the cost of travel may be a very significant issue for some of these people, it is beyond the mandate of the TTC to effectively resolve broader social and community issues related to income distribution and welfare. (TTC Ridership Growth Strategy, 2003, p. 8)

This statement has been repeated at several points following its original issuance in 2003 (TTC, 2013b), and has represented the TTC’s policy on affordability and fare equity – until very recently.

A game-changing City of Toronto staff report was released in June 2014 – in the midst of the writing of this report – that considered the development of a policy framework concerning transit fare equity, with affordability for low-income riders as the foremost concern (City of Toronto, 2014). The report, entitled "Toward a Policy Framework for Toronto Transit Fare Equity," was the work of an interdivisional committee including: the Toronto Transit Commission; Toronto Public Health; Social Development, Finance and Administration; Toronto Employment and Social Services; City Planning, and more. This represents a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach to transit decision-making and policy than had been considered previously. Its concerns take into account the various social needs and goals served by transit, aside from simply mobility or physical travel in itself. This staff report, coupled with the recent Toronto Public Health (2013) report on the impact of transit accessibility and affordability on inequitable health outcomes, demonstrates a shift in approach to transit in Toronto. This shift has moved the city’s transit discourse further into the realm of understanding it as a social service, using the discourse of accessibility and social inclusion – discursive shifts which have been key in broadening the understanding of transit towards the social in other regions. These discourses and associated literature will be explored in the following chapter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When searching for literature that would be applicable to the issue of transit affordability in Toronto, I consulted a few areas of literature that could be brought together to support this work. As a fundamental starting point, the transportation justice movement in the United States that emerged from the civil rights and environmental justice movements is a foundation on which all other concerns could be built, and its framing of the inequitable distribution of "benefits" and "burdens" of transportation is highly relevant (Bullard, 1997).

In exploring the benefits of transit, I argue that transit performs a social service function, but do not want to limit this function to connecting people with employment, as identified in the "spatial mismatch" literature that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s and rose to prominence in the 1980s (see Holzer, 1991 for a review of this literature). Connecting transportation to employment has been a key framing mechanism to highlight inequities on the basis of race, and particularly racial segregation in the US, as well as the "neuter commuter" assumptions that detrimentally impacted women (Law, 1999). However casting transit as primarily and most valuably a connector to employment – while certainly important and certainly relevant to income disparity – limits the holistic understanding of the variety of ways in which transit provides social welfare benefits. For this purpose, I look to the "social exclusion" literature that emerged largely out of the United Kingdom (but also was pursued in Australia and the United States) which explicitly connects transportation and transit to social exclusion, a widespread yet elusive and nearly immeasurable social phenomenon. For this reason, I am also concerned with metrics of evaluation, and how to make determinations about what is equitable, and for this segment, the work of a Canadian transportation policy researcher, Todd Litman, is very relevant. Finally, I look to some of the work that has been done in Toronto – connect it to other efforts across Canada – to demonstrate the significance of the work of the Fair Fare Coalition within its political, economic, and social context.

Transportation Justice and Public Transit

In the United States, there is a fairly well established movement for transportation justice – reflected in scholarship, activist and advocacy work in many American cities as well as recognized by federal policy. The history of transportation in the US, distinct from that of Canada, has shown transportation to be a key site of racialization which has shaped the emergence of transportation justice (Bullard, 1997, p. 1). Following the civil rights era, in which transportation played a role in one of the most iconic demonstrations, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, transportation justice later emerged as a distinct concern in relation to the environmental justice movement in America in the 1980s.

The concept of transportation justice has not received a great deal of attention in Toronto like it has in many American cities, but it is very applicable and significant in Canada's largest urban region. Bullard (1997) notes three broad categories wherein differential distribution of "benefits" and "burdens" can be traced in relation to transportation: "procedural, geographic, and social" (p. 2) – procedural, with regard to decision making; geographic, with regard to the spatial aspects of transportation service provision; and social, with regard to factors such as race, class, and gender. While transit may produce and provide numerous benefits – some of which will be outlined in the following – these benefits are not distributed equitably. Inequities in Toronto's transit system can be identified along the lines of each category proposed by Bullard. For the purposes of this project and report, the focus will be on inequities experienced on the "social" aspect basis of income as well as the procedural aspect of transit decision-making.

Mobility and accessibility

Transportation provides a service that helps to accomplish social goals – and one of the most commonly mentioned is "mobility." Mobility, which Litman (2013) designates as the "physical travel," is often the focus of transportation planning and decision-making, but he argues it is "seldom an end in itself." Rather, he asserts "the ultimate goal of most transport activity is accessibility, which refers to people's ability to reach desired services and activities" (Litman, 2013, p. 6). Accessibility is the more pertinent concept when it comes to assessing and evaluating equity – but it is not straight-forward and easily measured. Litman (2013) points out that many factors can affect accessibility, including "transport network connectivity, the geographical distribution of activities, and transportation affordability" (p. 6). The last factor is of greatest significance to this report and project, but it interacts and combines with other factors to either help or hinder accessibility. Transit affordability is key to accessibility, but until recently, it has not been included in the TTC's accessibility framework.

"Accessibility"

The concept of accessibility is frequently invoked in transportation and transit planning, however, the term usually stands to represent just one aspect of all the dimensions of accessibility. It usually narrowly refers to physical accessibility, particularly to those with physical disabilities or different abilities. There are efforts to ensure transit, in particular, becomes increasingly "barrier-free" – acknowledging only particular types of barriers. Rarely is cost of transit seen as a barrier to accessibility.

While the TTC claims it is "committed to making its services accessible", it refers only to physical accessibility, not financial accessibility. While it does highlight a concern that the TTC remain "affordable to both TTC customers and taxpayers" it is in the language of efficiency and cost-effectiveness (TTC website, “Transit Planning”). There is no qualification of what might be ‘affordable’ or not, and there are no policies or programs currently in place to ensure that the TTC is, or becomes more, affordable. There has only recently been unprecedented movement towards seeing affordability as key to accessibility for transit in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2014).

Transit as a social service

The concepts of mobility and accessibility – the recognition that transportation serves to connect individuals and communities with more than simply the ability to move around, but rather that that is significant in a number of ways – underpin the assertion that transportation and transit perform a social service. Both mobility and accessibility – and more accurately, their deficiency – have connected transportation planning to social welfare primarily through the “social exclusion” framework. This framework highlights that transportation provides access not simply to physical locations, but access to life opportunities, social inclusion, determinants of health, and better quality of life.

Although, in most cases, the social dimensions and goals of transportation and transit have not been well served by policy and decision-making processes – particularly in Toronto – acknowledging the social justice dimensions of transportation is not a completely new idea, particularly within the academic literature. Lucas (2012) traces the study of transportation inequality back to 1973, when Wachs and Kumagai “identified physical mobility as a major contributor to social and economic inequality in the US context” (Lucas, 2012, p. 106). Particularly in the past two decades, there has been a growing body of literature connecting transportation and transit with its social service functions – providing mobility and accessibility – asserting that it performs a vital service from which some are excluded or face significant barriers to access. With a broad view of transportation benefits, this body of literature connects transportation with social inclusion, and sees barriers to accessing transport as (re)producing and entrenching social exclusion. Some of this literature also connects transport and transit with health outcomes, such as quality of life.

Several scholars have provided the critique that social justice aspects of transportation and transit have failed to figure prominently in public policy goals. Transportation policy and social goals have not been combined well, particularly because they are “insufficiently understood and poorly defined” according to Stanley and Vella-Brodrick (2009, p. 90). Hine and Mitchell (2001) noted that the language of transport planning has traditionally been technocratic, based on a “universal disembodied subject” and had neglected to include the social impacts of transportation decision-making – and they insist that it is exactly this aspect which must now figure as a prominent policy priority.

Lucas (2012) has provided a more recent review, and a more optimistic assessment of the progress that has been made in including social welfare aspects into transportation planning and scholarship. She highlights the way in which the concept of “social exclusion” in particular has made some noteworthy contributions to the study of transport. As a result of the scholarly work on this concept with regard to transportation, she asserts there have been three notable areas of progress:

> (i) better conceptualization of transport-related exclusion as a social phenomenon; (ii) improved identification and measurement of social disadvantage and its interaction with transport provision, in different geographical contexts, using new and innovative techniques and; (iii) greater policy recognition of these issues and practical responses to the problem. (Lucas, 2012, p. 107).

Social exclusion

Social exclusion refers, broadly, to the existence of barriers that may limit or prevent an individual or community’s full participation in society. There are many causes and contributors of social exclusion, and transportation has been recognized as a significant aspect of social exclusion in a number of studies (Hine & Mitchell, 2001; Kenyon et al., 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Litman, 2003; Bradshaw et al., 2004; Dodson et al., 2004).

Social exclusion is not a static end-state, but rather a dynamic process (Preston & Rajé, 2007), and one of a cyclical nature wherein the "the boundary between causes or drivers and outcomes of social exclusion, is unclear" (Bradshaw et al., 2004).

Connecting Transportation to Social Exclusion

Kenyon, Lyons and Rafferty (2002) have offered a widely-referenced definition of mobility-related social exclusion:

> The process by which people are prevented from participating in the economic, political and social life of the community because of reduced accessibility to opportunities, services and social networks, due in whole or in part to insufficient mobility in a society and environment built around the assumption of high mobility. (pp. 210-11)

If transportation exclusion is a driver of social exclusion, it can also be an outcome of social exclusion – and in this case, financial barriers to accessing transit can arise from poverty-related social exclusion, but transportation disadvantage can then also contribute to poverty and social exclusion by limiting access to life opportunities such as education and training programs, employment, recreation, health services, social networks and more.

There have been several studies that identify transportation and transit as a significant aspect of social exclusion, particularly in the United Kingdom, where the Prime Minister identified transport as a cause of social exclusion at the launch of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1997 (Bradshaw et al, 2004, p. 78). The SEU went on to produce a landmark report in 2003, entitled *Making the Connections: Transport and Social Exclusion*. As the title suggests, this report acknowledges transport as key to producing, and therefore key to overcoming, social exclusion. The report notes that transport contributes to social exclusion by restricting access to life activities and opportunities that are vital to a healthy life, such as employment, education, health care, food, and recreation. Lacking access to transport means, by implication, lacking access to other social goods and services that contribute to well-being. This report made a significant contribution by identifying and outlining the inter-relationships between transport disadvantage and key areas of social policy concern (Lucas, 2012, p. 105). The report also resulted in applicable policy action, with the development of transport policy guidelines that require local authorities to include accessibility planning in their local transport plans (Lucas, 2012).

In their study of Scottish transport, Hine and Mitchell (2001) assert that the social dimensions of transport are often overlooked in transport planning and operation. This oversight contributes to the production of what they call "transport disadvantage" – which Dodson *et al* (2004) later defined as a "condition of disadvantage (social, economic, labour market, housing) in which transport plays a strong role" (p. 27). Hine & Mitchell (2001) use the term to identify the fact that some members of the public face significant barriers or limitations to accessing transportation of various kinds. While some may avoid using public transit, Hine & Mitchell remind that others do not have any other options and are forced to put up with its inadequacies – a recognition that later led to the identification of those who are "transit dependent" within the transportation justice literature (Garrett & Taylor, 1999). Drawing from disability studies literature, Hine and Mitchell argue that transportation decision-making and planning is "premised on a universal, disembodied subject" without any social characteristics. While Hine and Mitchell do not focus explicitly on particulars of social characteristics that are marginalized from this asocial subject, others have explored factors such as race, gender, and class in relation to transportation (Bullard, 1997; Law, 1999). Hine and Mitchell assert that the social dimensions of transport, and particularly transport disadvantage, must not only be recognized but should be a priority for transport policy. They admit this is difficult to accomplish "partly due to the elusiveness of definable concepts (or methods) to measure the social impacts of transport planning" (Hine & Mitchell, 2001, p. 320) – a difficulty which persists.

Criticisms and drawbacks of the social exclusion approach

While identifying transportation’s role in contributing to social exclusion has led to some important developments in scholarship and policy, there are also some drawbacks and limitations of the social exclusion approach to addressing the underlying social welfare aspects of transportation and transit. For one thing, it is difficult to definitively identify, and even more difficult to measure and evaluate (Delbosc & Currie, 2011, p. 555).

Furthermore, while social exclusion is certainly seen to be a detrimental phenomenon, and social inclusion is positioned as the social goal, it is not completely straightforward and we must ensure iterations of social inclusion are inclusive rather than prescriptive. That is to say, there is no singular standard or model of social inclusion to which all must conform and understandings of social inclusion should be produced from the bottom-up rather than top-down. As Cass, Shove, and Urry (2005) point out, claims about access and exclusion “routinely make assumptions about what it is to participate effectively in society” (p. 539). For example, these assumptions are demonstrated by the amount of literature that focuses on access to employment as key to social inclusion – which is only one, narrowly-framed and culturally- and politically-specific, way of understanding participation in society. Cass, Shove, and Urry remind that “[a]ccess and the accompanying ‘social inclusion’ can mean many different things for different people and have different implications for their mobility” (Cass, Shove & Urry, 2003, p. 6-7).

Social inclusion is not necessarily the most accurate or useful way of identifying the social goals. Several authors point out that “well-being” and increased quality of life are more pertinent concepts.

In assessing the usefulness of the concept of social exclusion to inform social policy in transport, Stanley and Vella-Brodrick (2009) press for broadened criteria that include many aspects of well-being. They acknowledge the introduction of social exclusion to the field of transportation has broadened the concept of “access” beyond physical accessibility and has led to the inclusion of some social goals. They argue, however, that social exclusion has gaps and limitations too and does not present a holistic picture of social goals. It tends to represent, rather, a value judgement about what social inclusion looks like, pushing towards a "consumer-based society and particular political or cultural paradigms" (Stanley & Vella-Brodrick, 2009, p. 93). For this reason, they press the need to broaden the criteria examined to encompass all aspects of well-being. Furthermore, they assert that this criteria of inclusion and well-being should be self-determined by people rather than being assumed by top-down policy approaches (Stanley & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Delbosc and Currie (2011) position well-being as the end-product of social inclusion goals, and argue that this should therefore be the focus. They are also concerned that emphasis on the wrong aspect could be counterproductive to the actual goal of well-being: "[p]ursuing the goal of mobility, access or inclusion just for the sake of it may divert resources toward programs that do not, in the end, foster well-being." (Delbosc & Currie, 2011, p. 555)

Although there may be a variety of social goals that transit contributes to – mobility, accessibility, social inclusion, well-being – recognition in itself is not enough. There remains the question of how to measure and evaluate whether the social goals are being served, and whether they are being served equitably.

Evaluating Equity in Transportation and Transit

Proving the existence of transportation injustice can be difficult, as "we have only scattered evidence about the distribution of the costs and benefits derived from transportation policy, investment, and planning" (Schweitzer & Valenzuela, 2004, p. 383) as different methodologies of study can contribute to different analyses and evidence of injustice. It remains to be questioned how we can measure and ensure equity.

There may be different types of claims of injustice, outlined by Schweitzer & Valenzuela (2004) as: cost-based (disproportionately facing the costs of transportation); benefit-based (being excluded from benefits of transportation), and process-based (exclusion from decision-making processes).

Given that much transportation decision-making as well as transportation research is conducted through a positivistic, empirical research framework (Schweitzer & Valenzuela, 2004), it is easier to identify the costs and benefits in outcomes rather than in the processes that may lead to such outcomes. This report and the work of the Fair Fare Coalition attempt to address inequity in both processes and outcomes in transit-related decision-making, as well as attempts to fill the gap in research through a participatory and experience-based research framework.

Equity

Equity is a key concept in transportation justice. Equity refers to “the distribution of impacts (benefits and costs) and whether that distribution is considered fair and appropriate” (Litman, 2013, p. 2). Litman (2013) acknowledges that evaluation of equity in transportation can be difficult because “there are several types of equity, many potential impacts to consider, various ways to measure impacts, and many possible ways to categorize people" (p. 2).

Litman categorizes the following types of equity: horizontal (equal treatment of equals); vertical with-respect-to income and social class; vertical with-respect-to need and ability. Whereas horizontal equity is equal treatment among parties who are equal, vertical equity acknowledges differences in needs, abilities, income, and social class. He asserts that “[b]y this definition, transport policies are equitable if they favor economically and socially disadvantaged groups, therefore compensating for overall inequities” (Litman, 2013, p. 2). This logic supports the creation of a discounted transit-pass for those on a low income, as the Fair Fare Coalition is attempting to accomplish.

Litman (2013) also distinguishes between “equity of opportunity” and “equity of outcome” on a broad level, and demonstrates how transit connects these two concepts. He claims there is currently general agreement in Canada about providing equal opportunity – being able to access education or employment, for example – but there is not political agreement about attempting to ensure equity of outcome. But transportation provides key access to opportunities, and therefore by corresponding with even the most "conservative" definition of equity, he argues towards policies that would ensure equitable access to transit. Equitable transportation policies may support and enhance equity of outcome in other policy areas. Transportation and public transit have a key role to play in social equity as a whole.

Equity with regard to funding

There is a body of literature as well as institutional recognition within the United States that addresses the particular equity implications of transportation funding (Rosenbloom and Altshuler, 1977; Pucher, 1981; Altshuler, 2010; Transportation Research Board, 2011), but these concerns are not as prominent in Canadian transportation decision-making or scholarship. The financing of transit can further entrench income polarization – or it can perform a redistributive function. Giuliano, Hu, and Lee (2001) argue that public transit's role in providing basic mobility, particularly for those with no other transportation options, is a strong justification for government subsidies.

Aside from basic mobility, transit provides widespread benefits to all, not only those who rely on it. In Toronto, it has been argued that transit makes a beneficial contribution to all residents by reducing emissions related to private automobile transportation (Kennedy, 2002), contributing towards economic prosperity (Canadian Urban Transit Association, 2010), and increasing social inclusion (Toronto Public Health, 2013). Transit is especially important to low-income residents of the city as it provides access to determinants of health such as healthy food, medical services, education, employment, social and recreational activities, and more (Toronto Public Health, 2013). Access to transit is also a key factor in preventing homelessness (Metropolitan Toronto, 1997).

Transit in Toronto is not well-funded by government subsidies, however, despite the widespread benefits it provides. Toronto transit riders receive the lowest government subsidy per-rider and pay the highest proportion of the system's operating costs among all other transit systems in North America. This existing funding structure of transit contributes to inequity in Toronto. Transit fare increases have exceeded the rate of inflation (TTC, 2003) and Toronto has one of the least affordable transit passes in Canada (Toronto Public Health, 2013). While this may seem obviously 'unfair', the TTC may benefit from scholarly support that evaluates the equity dimensions of transit funding.

There may currently be an opportunity to contribute to the public discourse with regard to the equity dimensions of transit funding in Toronto. In the surrounding Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), concerns around the equity of funding have arised in relation to the capital costs associated with transportation mega-project the Big Move – the 25-year regional transportation strategy with a $50 billion price tag, as yet unclear how it will be financed. Hugh MacKenzie (2013) from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has produced a report evaluating the distributional justice implications of a variety of transit-supportive revenue tools that may be options for the Big Move. In this report, he criticized transit fares as an "extremely regressive revue tool" (p. 28). Offered as a flat rate irrespective of income, riders with a lower-income pay a higher proportion of their income to use the service (Mackenzie, 2013). Toronto Public Health and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (n.d.) have stated that in a healthy transportation system, "low-income riders do not shoulder the heaviest burden of paying for transit" and point out that a more equitable society is healthier for all.

Affordability as a barrier to access

While transit can be argued to perform a vital social service function, how can we evaluate the distribution of the benefits it provides? Some barriers may be easier to identify and evaluate than others. Because of the physical and observable nature, physical accessibility – in terms of both geographic availability of transit service and in barrier-free accessibility of the transit system and vehicles – may be easier to measure. Affordability, on the other hand, may be an invisible barrier to transit. While there is some – albeit limited – data with regard to transit ridership, we do not have information about trips not taken. If there are people who cannot even afford to access transit, that information is not readily available unless there is a specific point made to ask low-income people about their experiences – which has been the aim of the Fair Fare Coalition's project.

There have been several studies that have highlighted people's experience with cost of transit as a barrier to access internationally (Hine & Mitchell, 2001; Kenyon et al, 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). In Toronto, some attention has been given to the importance – and lack – of transit affordability (Metropolitan Toronto, 1997; Khosla, 2003; Toronto Women's City Alliance, 2010; Shapiro, 2012; Toronto Public Health, 2013). As previously mentioned, TTC fares are frequently increased to cover the budgetary gap, and Toronto has one of the least affordable monthly transit passes in Canada (Toronto Public Health, 2013) (see Appendix E) – factors that serve as a financial barrier to accessing transit, and therefore accessing the many benefits it provides. However, transit policy has not yet responded to include these concerns. The City of Toronto will be launching a study into developing a policy framework that works towards transit fare equity, with affordability for low-income residents as a central concern (City of Toronto, 2014). The Fair Fare Coalition will continue working to ensure that standards of what represents an 'affordable' fare include the input of community members who would be making use of this discounted rate. If the discounted rate remains unaffordable to transit riders who need it the most, equity will not be served.

Data collection

As demonstrated in the previous discussion, it is generally challenging to evaluate the equity aspects of transit due to the difficulty of defining key concepts. Further challenges arise when examining the case of transit equity in Toronto as, at this point in time, there are no strong data sources for the socio-demographic data of transit usage in Toronto. This is especially unfortunate when it comes to income, as has so far been demonstrated as a crucial part of transit use and affordability, but further information could contribute to a more thorough understanding, which could in turn press for more equitable policy options.

Many studies of the socio-demographics of transit in Canada and Toronto have relied on Statistics Canada's *Census of Canada* data, which was collected through the mandatory long-form census. In 2011, the previously mandatory long-form census was replaced with a voluntary questionnaire called the *National Household Survey*. Given the voluntary nature of the questionnaire and small sample size, its statistics will not provide a full and accurate picture of socio-economic demographic trends.

The TTC used to conduct a "customer attitude survey." It no longer does this, and access to the information is difficult. The information has been archived, yet one is required to fill out an access to information request in order to retrieve surveys conducted prior to 1994. The Transportation Tomorrow Survey (TTS), conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO), looks into "how, why, and where" residents of the GTHA travel. Despite this mandate, it actually does not tell us relevant information about the people themselves – with no questions about income, and few socio-demographic questions – nor about the costs of transportation and transit. According to the Board of Health (2013) recommendation, TTS needs to "collect more information on the socio-demographic characteristics of public transit users (including at a minimum household income) and public transit costs and implement strategies to promote inclusion of hard to reach groups in the survey" and has put this concern forward to the MTO (Toronto Public Health, 2013).

Other Canadian Jurisdictions and Transit Affordability

While measures to increase affordability of transit in Toronto have been continually struck down and halted, other jurisdictions in Canada have addressed this issue in a number of ways. For example, a low-income transit pass program has been implemented by at least 15 jurisdictions in Canada, including many in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) (Dempster & Tucs, 2012). The details of eligibility criteria, discount level, funding, and administration of the pass program differ by region, however, each offers a reduced cost pass option to residents who meet income-related criteria (see Appendix F). Many of the programs use the low-income cut off rate (LICO) as a metric of evaluation, some programs are offered to social assistance recipients, and some require recipients of the discount to be working. The low-income passes in jurisdictions profiled by Dempster & Tucs (2012) offered discounts that ranged from 32% to 57%.

Waterloo, for example, has been offering a Transit for Reduced Income Program (TRIP) since 2002 and evaluation of the program by participants has shown it to be well-received. The success of this program has led to increased transit affordability measures in Waterloo, such as the Transit Assistance Pass Program (TAPP) introduced in 2010, which offers a free monthly pass to recipients of Ontario Works that meet specific, education-related criteria (Dempster & Tucs, 2012). See appendix for further details of other discounted pass programs in various Canadian jurisdictions.

As Canada's largest municipality with the third largest transit system in North America and increasing wealth disparity (Hulchanski, 2010), Toronto must consider options to increase the affordability of the TTC. Currently, the cost of transit in Toronto serves as a barrier to access. This means many of the city's most vulnerable residents are restricted in access to many determinants of health, resulting in inequitable health outcomes. Transit must be recognized to play a key role in social goals – contributing to mobility, accessibility, social inclusion, well-being, and quality of life – so that it can be valued as such. The "costs" of transit in Toronto extend beyond the individual cost of fare, but extend to social costs. The Fair Fare

Coalition has been advocating for the implementation of measures to increase transit affordability in Toronto since 2010. The current community-based research project attempts to identify and address inequities within the current transit system's planning and operation.

METHODOLOGY

There is a dearth of literature addressing transit injustice in Toronto, particularly with regard to the equity implications of transit funding. The Fair Fare Coalition's project brings together concerns of social welfare and public health with transportation planning – a confluence which challenges the field of transportation planning not simply by introducing new data, but by also introducing and demonstrating the significance of methodologies and epistemologies that are not traditionally used in the field.

Transportation planning, commonly dominated by technocratic "experts" and based on a "universal disembodied subject" (Hine & Mitchell, 2001), frequently fails to incorporate social welfare concerns and policy goals. Furthermore, transportation planning does not include, and even marginalizes, the lived experiences of those who use, and even depend on, transit services. In Toronto, as Schachter and Liu (2005) have observed of New Jersey, the official language of transit planning – technical, abstracted, under the guise of neutrality – poses challenges for the integration of community knowledge and lived experience of the system. In fact, according to Schachter and Liu, community knowledge is devalued and undermined in this process – although it could actually be an asset to transit planning.

Because of the dynamics of this expert-led transit planning environment, the Fair Fare Coalition's project – as a community-based project focused on gathering, strengthening, and mobilizing community knowledge – is a vital and valuable contribution. This research process has aimed to make space for voices and experiences that are usually marginalized, but are heavily impacted by, official planning and decision-making processes. The community-based research process aims to create a space for participants to share their experiences and, if they desire, contribute to planning an event or action to attempt to bring more attention to the voices and experiences of those frequently marginalized.

Research Sub-Committee

In January 2014, the Fair Fare Coalition established a Research Sub-Committee. This Committee came to involve five members of the FFC as well as four new community members from the Toronto Drop-In Network's (TDIN) Advocacy Committee. The purpose of this Committee would be to deliberate the aims and goals of the research, contemplate timelines, and discuss research frameworks as methods – focusing specifically on participatory action research (PAR) as the previously agreed-upon research framework.

The Research Sub-Committee was responsible for establishing the goals of the research, honing the research questions, shaping the format and research methods, coordinating logistics, and working out timelines.

The Sub-Committee agreed that the research process and product were aimed at supporting the advocacy goals of the Fair Fare Coalition – most urgently, working to establish a low-income monthly transit pass in Toronto. We had contemplated two different options for prioritizing our efforts and going about this process:

1. The process of the research is the main priority – that is, going about a participatory action research process in such a way that we were most concerned with community knowledge and capacity building. If this were the priority, we could take our time with the research and ensure that there would be ample opportunity for research participants to be co-creators of the research goals, aims, and agenda at every step of the way. This would necessitate a longer time frame to carry out.

2. The advocacy goals are the main priority – therefore, the PAR process would be approached in such a way that could best and most strategically support the goal of establishing a low-income transit pass in Toronto. Strategically speaking, a shorter timeframe for the preparation of project deliverables would be preferable, as there is currently a seeming open window of opportunity to advocate on the FFC's goals: the recent work within a City department (Toronto Public Health) is supportive of considering the impacts of lack of transit affordability; a City Councillor has been open to receiving input from FFC to draft transit fare and affordability motions to put before council; and there has been recent interest and support from prominent advocacy bodies, such as Social Planning Toronto. Furthermore, there is an approaching municipal election in the fall of 2014 and sooner timing for project turnaround might allow us to get the issue on the election campaign agenda. The goal would be to complete the data collection during the summer of this year.

Because of the strong desire to focus around particular advocacy goals, and the lack of (or unknown) capacity to support a long-term "full" PAR process, the Sub-Committee decided to move forward with a "modified" PAR project, aiming to produce a research findings and a project deliverable as soon as possible. One of the Research Sub-Committee members did not feel comfortable referring to our decided research process as participatory action research, given that there were limited opportunities for participants to set the research agenda. The Sub-Committee decided that the term "community-based research" was a more appropriate term for the research we intended to carry out, however, both frameworks have been influential in shaping the nature of our research.

In this, the research would focus on the specific advocacy goal of establishing a low-income transit pass in Toronto. The research would be gathering evidence of a need for this discounted pass by speaking with people on a low-income throughout the city. Since the research was to be focused specifically around this aim, there would be no opportunity for the participants to set the research agenda or research question – detracting from the collaborative potential. However, at my suggestion, research participants would be invited to determine how we could move forward with this research. Specifically, we would support bringing together interested participants to plan a launch event for the report and/or further actions to advocate for the establishment of a low-income discounted transit pass. This would build community capacity and mobilize knowledge in support of measures to increase transit affordability led by those who are most heavily impacted.

Community-Based Research and Participatory Action Research

Because the power relations of knowledge production and municipal decision making were central concerns of the Fair Fare Coalition's project, it was a foremost concern that our research framework and process addressed but did not reinscribe highly unequal power relations as we attempted to gather community information about the costs of transit. We initially sought to carry out a participatory action research project, but in acknowledging our limitations, we recognized we could not do the full PAR framework justice. We continued to integrate the concerns and approach of PAR whenever possible, but we termed our project a community-based research project that is also participatory. I will outline relevant aspects of both research frameworks.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) "facilitates a collaborative, equitable partnership in all phases of research, involving an empowering and power-sharing process that attends to social inequalities" (Hacker, 2013, p. 12). There is an emphasis on "colearning" – the mutual nature of knowledge production – attempting to mitigate the traditionally unequal power relations of knowledge production. There is also emphasis on capacity building among all partners in the research process.

The intention of PAR is to transform rather than reinscribe existing power relationships. Yeich and Levine (1992) see PAR as an interventionist practice in which the people most impacted by inequity are in full control over the intervention (p. 1894). Hall (1992) outlines the numerous, radical implications of PAR:

> Participatory research: joins people together for radical social change (Maguire,1987:29); enables oppressed groups to acquire leverage for action (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991:4); presents people as researchers in pursuit of answers to questions of daily struggle and survival (Tandon, 1988:7); breaks down the distinction between the researchers and the researched (Gaventa, 1988:19); … and returns to the people the legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991:15) (p. 17).

These possibilities are consonant with the Fair Fare Coalition's goals and approach. Although the people most heavily impacted by inequity may not be in "full" control over the intervention, we agreed to make as much space for community autonomy as we could.

Although the Fair Fare Coalition was pursuing this research in support of established advocacy goals to increase transit affordability in Toronto, the research process rather than just the research outcome was a priority for the Fair Fare Coalition. The aim has been to support the bringing together of community knowledge and experiences, especially from low-income individuals who are marginalized from yet highly impacted by transit decision-making processes. In the research process, we sought to foster a collaborative process of knowledge production that attempted to mitigate the traditionally unequal power relationships, valuing and legitimizing self-produced community knowledge and problem-solving. This in itself can be a transformative process, regardless of the response from the expert decision-makers in moving towards more affordable and more equitable transit in Toronto.

My involvement as an activist-scholar

I had been attending meetings of the Fair Fare Coalition since July 2013, and found it to be a fortuitous and hopefully mutually-beneficial coincidence that the group was looking to embark on a community-based research project around the same time I was contemplating my options for my major research project in MES. Both the subject matter and the research methodology matched my own interests so strongly.

I was also familiar enough with the FFC to recognize that although/because many of the members are such strong and dedicated activists and advocates, with a high degree of commitment and involvement in social service jobs and community organizing, the group had constrained capacity to move forward with this desired research. Rather than simply assume, I asked the group if they felt that was the case. And in response to having my suspicions confirmed, I offered to dedicate my great availability of time, energy, and resources to taking the lead in advancing the research project. It seemed to have been agreed upon at the meeting – albeit without an informal vote – that this was a workable and welcomed arrangement.

Having read quite a bit of literature on community-based research in general and working as a scholar-activist on planning and policy issues specifically (Reardon et al, 1993; Sandercock, 1998; Grengs, 2002), I was prepared for the subsequent process to present challenges. I was sensitive about my role as a researcher who was not quite an outsider to the group, but who had perhaps not been around long enough to develop strong relationships of mutual trust. Undertaking a major research project that would be made public is a major undertaking for a small advocacy organization, so ensuring the research process and product accurately represent the values and goals of the organization is fundamentally important.

Although the situation and desires of the FFC matched my own research interests and timing in terms of expectations for my academic program, I did not intend to use the aims and goals of the group to suit my own needs. I fear, however, I had been interpreted this way by one fellow member of the FFC and the research sub-committee. I made it a point to say, right from the beginning, that I only wanted to partner with the FFC in this manner if it was beneficial to the group and furthered its goals, and had no intention of rerouting or taking anything away from the group or its aims. I was prepared to discontinue my involvement in the project if anyone made it apparent that they were uncomfortable with my presence and my role as a researcher. While I did experience some challenges and communicative difficulties with one member, I did eventually establish enough trust with the group that the collaborative research process could proceed.

I had been explicit about my institutional involvement, and the timeframes and obligations that required of me. One of these requirements was the Research Ethics aspect required of research involving human participants carried out by any researcher at York University. Since the FFC also values research ethics and receiving the informed consent of participants about the research practices, the Research Sub-Committee approved of me presenting and asking for participant signatures on the research ethics form at each focus group session. I ensured that the presentation of these ethics was the foremost concern before we began, yet was integrated into the focus group sessions. Since the community-based research was primarily concerned about the power dynamics of knowledge production, and the ensuing marginalization, this ethics component paired very naturally with the research concerns.

Research Questions

The Research Sub-Committee convened a number of times to brainstorm and then hone our guiding research questions, which were finally established as follows:

- Firstly: How are people who currently struggle with the rising costs of transit managing their daily lives and mobility? What strategies are being used to manage finances? How much of a barrier to mobility is the cost of transit?
- Secondly: What steps could the TTC take to make transit more accessible and affordable – to increase access and mobility for people who struggle with transit's costs?

Methods / Tools

Within the CBR framework, the research *process* is just as significant – if not more significant than – the research *outcome*. Therefore, the methods used to facilitate the creation of community knowledge take on a heightened importance. Just as with PAR, the aim is to produce social change – not simply to “gather information on a social phenomenon" (Yeich and Levine, 1992, p. 1896) – and more specifically, change that is led by the people who are most detrimentally impacted by inequitable social structures, processes, and institutions themselves.

In the FFC’s research approach and goals, there existed a delicate tension between a desire to concretely highlight the impact of transit costs with the intention of supporting the FFC’s existing advocacy goals and a desire to have the research process, including setting the research agenda, be community-driven and collaborative. For this reason, two research tools were chosen, with the hopes that each would provide their own strengths: focus groups, and a written questionnaire. Both research tools would be used in tandem with each other during the same sessions. Focus groups of ten to fifteen low-income participants would be held in different locations throughout the city – as it turned out, in eight different community organizations and social service agencies – during which a paper questionnaire would also be completed. The focus groups would allow an opportunity for broader and less structured conversation, problem-definition, and problem-solving while the questionnaires would allow for the collection of information the FFC deemed relevant to its goals.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered in a written format, presented in the English language, which means that it relied on some degree of English literacy on the part of the participants. The FFC had very limited translation resources available for this research, and so it was necessary to proceed in this manner, with the understanding that it would produce some unwanted exclusion.

A questionnaire was chosen because the Research Sub-Committee wanted to gather concrete and quantifiable data on the uses of and barriers to public transit in Toronto for low-income residents – particularly due to the gaps in the existence of this kind of data.

The questionnaire has several sections, and twenty-five questions in total (the full questionnaire is included in Appendix G). We sought to understand some basic aspects of getting around, such as different types of transportation used, time and frequency of transit usage, and destinations reached or not reached by transit. In terms of paying for transit, we asked questions about types of fare payment methods, how much money participants spend monthly on transit, and strategies for managing costs. We also sought to establish a clear link between low-income and transit affordability barriers, so we asked participants to volunteer information about their level of income (if they felt comfortable) and whether or not they were social assistance recipients. We also included a question specifically about student status, and if participants were eligible for the student discounted transit pass, as some of the focus groups were held in adult education centres which are not yet officially recognized as eligible for the student discount transit pass that the TTC offers.

The questionnaire was not intended to be solely statistical and demographic information gathering, but also presented an opportunity to solicit ideas about opportunities to make transit in Toronto more affordable. We asked questions that focused specifically around the advocacy goals for the Fair Fare Coalition – such as transit needs on extreme weather days in Toronto, as well as accessing free tokens distributed by social service and community agencies. We also asked open-ended questions so that respondents could provide the information they thought was most pertinent. We asked about how daily life would change if participants did not have to be concerned about the costs of accessing transit – a question which could have numerous types of responses that we did not want to define or limit. We also asked participants what one thing about public transit in Toronto should change, which was intended to provide us with a sense of the participants' self-determined priorities for transit in Toronto as well as provide an opportunity for participants to provide ideas and potential solutions. We asked participants if they thought a discounted low-income transit pass would be useful to them, and if one were offered, what rate of pay they could consider budgeting per month in order to access this pass. Finally, we also asked participants to rate, along a quantified spectrum, how much affordability served as a barrier to daily mobility. The questionnaires were administered within the 90-minute focus group session.

Focus Groups

Focus group were chosen because of their conversational nature, as they allow space for participants to identify and define related problems themselves, chose what was relevant or significant, and how to express it. The production of community knowledge occurs through what Freire (1993/1970) defines as the "dialogic method" – conversation, communication, and problem-solving together. I have been inspired by Khosla's (1993) use of focus groups in a PAR framework. Creating a space for low-income women of colour from across Toronto to speak to each other about their daily lives allows for the recognition that their experiences are not simply individual; they are part of a broader community of experience that results from their positionality in relation to the overarching social structure. The emphasis of focus groups within a PAR/CBR framework is not on extracting information alone, but is also about building these relationships and building capacity for social change and intervention.

There is great potential for "empowerment" within PAR/CBR focus groups. Yeich and Levine (1992) differentiate the type of empowerment that mobilizes individuals to create and change social structures from the type of empowerment that encourages individuals to learn to adapt to the existing social structure (p. 1895). The focus group process can be transformative, even in subtle ways. As Yeich and Levine point out, "even if meaningful social change is not immediately achieved, the activities involved in social change can be empowering" (p. 1899-1900). The FFC had hoped that research participants could have valuable experiences throughout the research process, even if we could not guarantee that our advocacy goals would be accomplished.

Ongoing nature of the research

Although the focus group sessions were limited to 90 minutes, the FFC collected contact information from participants who wished to remain in touch. At the end of each session, I distributed a piece of paper in which participants could chose either to be notified when the project had been completed and/or whether they wished to help contribute ideas towards and organize a launch event for the deliverable of the research process. The Fair Fare Coalition imagined that this research process could be an opportunity to continue to build relationships among participants (from the same and different focus group sessions) and for the Fair Fare Coalition to use this as an outreach and capacity building opportunity – to build the movement for income-related transit justice in Toronto.

Participants and partners

As the Fair Fare Coalition is made up of members of various social service agencies and community organizations, there already existed a built-in network in which to recruit participants and hold focus group sessions. I contacted and invited several social service and community agencies to partner with the Fair Fare Coalition on this research project, some of whom are members of the FFC, and others whom are not direct members. The existing members partners were: PTP; Sistering; South Riverdale Community Health Centre; and St. Stephen's Community House (The Corner Drop-In). I also did outreach to new agencies or directly incorporated existing allies, including the following: The Stop (Bread & Bricks Advocacy Group); Labour

Education Centre Adult Literacy Class; Agincourt Community Services Association; Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre (PARC). (See Appendix H for a map of where these different organizations are located.)

The hopeful intention has been to expand the network of the Fair Fare Coalition – to open up its advocacy efforts to the participation and inclusion of more residents across the city who may be impacted by transit costs.

Participants were recruited by contacts, who were front-line workers and familiar with many of the clients who used their services, at the partnering agencies and organizations. I had communicated the requirements of having a group of 5-15 people who were living on a low-income and had an interest in talking about transit affordability. All participants – at least those who contributed income information on the questionnaire – had an income under $30,000 per year, or $2,500 monthly, which roughly corresponds with the low-income cut-off rate.

There was no difficulty recruiting enthusiastic participants who contributed meaningfully to the discussion and to the project and we involved 86 participants in this project throughout eight focus group sessions in different geographic locations throughout the city, in Etobicoke, Toronto, and Scarborough.

A small honorarium was provided, funded by the Toronto Drop-In Network. We were able to offer each participant a $5 grocery voucher and two TTC tokens for participating in the 90-minute long sessions.

Data analysis

While the initial hope was that the Research Sub-Committee would be involved in the different steps of the research process, this was not always possible due to limited capacity. I personally did much of the data tabulation and analysis, as well as the focus group transcribing, and identifying key themes.

Questionnaire data was gathered in Excel, and tabulations and basic analytics were performed, essentially measuring rate of response for each question or set of questions. Some questions were open-ended written responses, which were identified and grouped by theme. See Appendix J for charts illustrating numerical data outcomes.

I presented this work to the larger Fair Fare Coalition group and received some feedback and suggestions for what information and themes may be included in our project deliverable, to be made public.

The FFC held a follow-up event in July 2014 in which participants from the focus group sessions and other low-income community members were invited to provide feedback on the research findings. The event was planned as brainstorming and planning session for how to move forward with the research, with some components of capacity building by generating and sharing knowledge about the political, economic, and social context. We asked participants to let us know if the findings seemed consistent with their own experience, if there was anything surprising to come out the research, or anything particularly important that they felt deserved extra emphasis. We also asked researchers how they thought the research should be used – who is the target audience we want to reach, and for what reason.

Findings

All research participants were public transit users who qualified as low-income residents of Toronto. Those who reported an income earned less than $30,000 or $2,500 monthly, with the bulk of respondents earning between $500 and $1000 monthly (see Appendix J, Fig. 1). Nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that they received Social Assistance, mainly OntarioWorks (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The sample size was 86 participants from different areas of the city, and while no explicit attempt was made to gather a sample representative of Toronto as a whole, participants ranged in age, gender, and cultural background.

Transit is the primary mode of transportation for participants, and frequently their only mode of transportation for long distances as the majority of respondents lived in households that did not own a car (see Appendix J, Fig. 2 and 3). The large majority of participants could be considered very frequent users of transit, and transit trips were made at all hours of the day, including morning and afternoon “peak” hours (see Appendix J, Fig. 4 and 5).

Participants travel to, and use transit to reach, a wide variety of destinations. The most commonly highlighted destination was medical or doctor’s appointments, followed by accessing food (whether it is a grocery store, food bank, or community meal), and accessing social service agencies or programs. All destinations we included in the multiple choice were marked by at least a handful of respondents, and they included: work (paid or volunteer); school or educational programs; legal services; recreation or leisure; and social – visiting family or friends (see Appendix J, Fig. 6). We also allotted a space where respondents could provide destinations not listed in the multiple choice. Some of the common responses included banking, the library, or church.

There are a variety of destinations that participants are unable to reach, mainly due to the cost of transit. Cost was the most common barrier identified in reaching destinations, explicitly mentioned in an open-ended question by more than a quarter of participants. Many participants stated that social destinations – visiting family or friends – were the most common destinations they could not reach due to cost.

Cost was found to be a significant barrier to transit usage and daily mobility. When participants were asked to evaluate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much of a barrier transit costs were to daily mobility (with 1 meaning it is a not a problem, and 10 meaning it is a big problem that prevents them from doing many things), the average response was 7.76. The majority of respondents selected high numbers, between 8 and 10, to represent that cost is a very significant barrier (see Appendix J, Fig. 7).

The estimated money spent on transit per month was over $100 for most respondents who answered that question (see Appendix J, Fig. 8). Tokens were the most common fare payment method used – some supplied for free by an agency – followed by cash fare. Not many respondents reported using monthly transit passes as their main fare method. Although there were 19 students within the whole group, none of them were eligible for the student discounted monthly pass. When asked in an open-ended manner why participants use that fare payment method that they do, “cost/affordability” was the most common response. Many commented that it did not feel like a choice, but they “had to” pay in that manner, or it was “what [they] could afford.”

It was also found that some trips are more expensive than others, particularly trips that involve multiple destinations, problems with the transit system, or travelling with family members. Due to these costs, many participants had devised methods and strategies for getting around on transit on a low income – such as planning a circular route – even if by prohibited means, such as using a transfer when it was no longer valid.

When asked open-endedly what one thing they would change about transit, cost/affordability was a very common response. Many offered suggestions on how to bring about fare reductions, such as: more government funding; fare reductions especially for certain groups (low-income, social assistance recipients, seniors); administering transit pass with social assistance; or implementing time-based transfers.

There was strong support for the Fair Fare Coalition’s goals. A significant majority of respondents (79%) thought a discounted pass would be useful to them personally (see Appendix J, Fig. 9. There were a handful people who might potentially find it useful. Only one respondent answered that it would not be useful to them. In terms of cost of this pass, while the responses ranged in amount, the most common response, and the average of all the responses, was $50 per month.

Furthermore, in terms of FFC's goals, about half of respondents noted that they have needed transit on a heat alert, cold alert, or smog alert day to get to a heating or cooling station (see Appendix J, Fig. 10). More than half of the participants identified that they had been affected by cuts in recent years to how many tokens drop-ins and agencies can provide in the sense that they have tried to get tokens but have been unable to (see Appendix J, Fig. 11). Even more than half felt it would be helpful if drop-ins and agencies could provide more tokens.

Participants were asked, in an open-ended questionnaire question, how daily life would change if they didn't have to be concerned about the costs of transit. Responses could be generally grouped into two categories: those that outlined a personal emotional or well-being outcome, or those that outlined their increased personal capacities. Though many responses, there was an overwhelming impression that if transit was more affordable, participants would have greater access to particular locations or life opportunities as a whole.

Respondents explained they could access services they currently cannot, or access preferable services that might be currently out of reach, such as a cheaper grocery store or one that has more culturally-specific foods. Other common responses of what they could access with increased mobility included more social activity and community involvement, like visiting family and friends, socializing, going to activities or events, or volunteering. Several respondents noted that currently, their budget is so tight that they cannot afford the transit costs to get to free events that are thought to be accessible. Employment and training opportunities could also be seized more readily, with decreased transit costs, according to respondents. It was also noted by a few participants that certain types of work require transit to move between work opportunities, including construction, domestic labour, trades, and acting.

Transit costs were set out by many participants as directly competing with food costs. If they didn't have to worry about transit costs, many respondents indicated that they could afford to spend more money on food. Many suggested they routinely sacrifice feeding themselves adequately due in part to the budgetary restriction produced by transit costs.

Increased emotional and physical well-being was one of the most common responses given when participants were asked how their daily life might change if they didn't have to worry about the costs of transit. According to respondents, it would reduce stress, provide freedom, produce a feeling of peace and happiness, and generally make life a lot easier – contributing to an increased well-being and quality of life. One respondent summarizes many of these aspects in their response: "If my metropass were easily affordable on my present income, I would have much less extreme stress in my life, not to mention access to food and many other important destinations I regularly struggle to reach on a daily basis."

ANALYSIS

Through the questionnaire and focus groups, the Fair Fare Coalition has been able to gather community experiences about the "costs" of current transit fares in Toronto. It became clear in the research process that participants feel overwhelmingly that riding the TTC is too expensive, and a severe strain on limited resources. Making transit more affordable would contribute significantly to improved well-being and quality of life, through increased mobility and accessibility. The FFC's research findings illustrate the argumentation around the "social exclusion" arguments outlined in the literature review that connect transit with social goals.

The findings show that there is a connection between low-income and transit dependence, as most participants did not have access to a car, and therefore rely on transit for daily mobility. There are a variety of places that participants go in daily life using transit – but because costs serves as a significant barrier to transit, they are frequently unable to access opportunities that they might like to otherwise. Aside from increased mobility, increasing transit affordability would have significant impacts for improving well-being and quality of life. Social goals, particularly from an equity framework, have not figured into much transit decision-making and discourse in Toronto. But this study makes the connection between transit and social welfare clear – and makes it clear that Toronto's transit system is not currently serving social welfare or social justice very well.

The City may now begin to look at options to increase transit fare equity, and it is valuable that the Fair Fare Coalition preemptively gathered community information about experience of transit access and barriers from low-income residents of Toronto. While City staff will produce a policy framework report for moving towards transit fare equity, there is no guarantee that this report and its recommendations will actually address the interests and experience of low-income community members who would most benefit from such a policy. Without integrating that key information into transit decision-making processes, the City might find itself implementing measures to increase transit affordability that do not actually serve those most in need of these measures. The Fair Fare Coalition will continue to gather and mobilize community knowledge in an attempt to ensure that policies adopted by the City and TTC value and integrate the experiences of low-income community members.

There is a great deal of support from research participants for the implementation of a discounted low-income monthly transit pass, as has been implemented in many surrounding jurisdictions in the GTA and across Canada. According, many people are unable to afford the current full cost pass, at $133.75, yet when transit costs throughout the month are added up incrementally, many are still spending more than $100 by buying tokens and paying cash fare. Participants mentioned having cash flow difficulties that prevent effective transit use: it can be a challenge to have enough cash at once for bulk token purchase,[5] never mind the purchase of a monthly pass. Furthermore, many participants commented that the "transportation allowance"

[5] Purchasing multiple tokens allows a fare discount, at $2.70 per token, compared to $3.00 cash fare

that is distributed on particular conditions to recipients of social assistance is only $100 and therefore does not cover the costs of a monthly pass.

Although the Fair Fare Coalition had not previously been advocating for the TTC to adopt a “time-based transfer” system (compared to their current “continuous trip” system), it became clear through the research process that this option would be a simple, effective method to reduce the costs associated with transit dependency. Many participants were not able to afford the current costs of a monthly transit pass, but paying per ride could frequently result in high-cost trips – especially when travelling with family members or visiting multiple destinations on one trip, which currently requires a new fare to be paid when re-entering the transit system. Furthermore, the TTC is currently considering the option of time-based transfers, for reasons other than affordability (TTC, 2014).

Due to these costs of transit use, many participants had devised methods and strategies for getting around on transit on a low income – even if by prohibited means. While this information cannot be included in the official Fair Fare Coalition public deliverable, as we do not wish to provide grounds for increased fare enforcement, the discussion on this topic proved very enthusiastic and humourous – but beyond the humour, it was a potentially useful way for community members in similarly strained circumstances to share resources and strategies for managing daily life and mobility. This example demonstrated the value of these focus group sessions for participants, aside from the advocacy goals or potential policy gains of the Fair Fare Coalition.

REFLECTION

Because my MES research project is a report on a community-based research project I undertook in partnership with an advocacy organization, there are two distinct layers of scholar-activist involvement to this work: working, firstly, with the members of the Fair Fare Coalition and its Research Sub-Committee to collaboratively design and carry out a community-based research project; and furthermore, working on the goals of the FFC's project in a community-based setting with low-income residents of Toronto, who participated in the focus group sessions and filled out questionnaires.

I have already provided some reflections on my role as a scholar-activist working with the Fair Fare Coalition, emphasizing that my presence and effort in leading this research would be extended only so long as it was helpful to the goals of the FFC and the group as a whole. While many members were distinctly welcoming and thankful for my presence in this research process, I was given vague and elusive impressions that one member was not comfortable with my presence. Particularly because we had been contemplating conducting the FFC research through a PAR framework – in which the power relations of knowledge production are an explicit foundation – this member seemed to have concerns that I would be exercising too much power over the process. They made it a point to directly address me to remind me, in front of the other members of the FFC at the onset of the Research Sub-Committee, that PAR "is research 'with' and 'for' the community you are serving- not 'about'" (email correspondence, January 17, 2014). This is a welcome and necessary reminder, but I felt it difficult to come to a stronger understanding of what they felt I was doing to betray this fundamental principle. Although I had offered to speak with them one-on-one about this, with an attempt to come to a greater understanding of their concerns, my offer to speak was either ignored or dismissed on multiple occasions. I had attempted to address the concerns of which I was made aware, but it never seemed to be enough, as a new opportunity for them to challenge my role arose repeatedly. However, given that the rest of the group and I seemed to have built mutual trust and respect, the research designing and implementation continued successfully, albeit without a grand sense of resolution with that one group member. During this time, I kept in mind that "tensions are a part of the process" (Reardon et al, 1993) of doing community-based research and scholar-activist work.

The process of conducting the Fair Fare Coalition's community-based research at community organizations and social service agencies throughout Toronto provided even more to reflect on. While we did not have the capacity to carry out a "full" PAR project, as we had originally contemplated, I feel that we collaboratively designed an ongoing project that has capacity for both quick turnaround or project deliverables as well as capacity for increasing involvement of participants – at least in theory.

Securing the ongoing participation of low-income community members can be challenging. This has been demonstrated by the low turnout of focus group participants to our follow-up event – only a handful of the 86 participants were able to attend – however, that is also in part to the short notice the FFC gave to would-be attendees. Individuals, communities, and organizations facing strained resources may not be able to contribute much more than they already have contributed to this program.

The research activities focus group sessions explained within this report, however, did go surprisingly well and were conducted in environments of enthusiastic participation. Each session was distinct, of course – as the various social service and community agencies, in geographically separate areas of the city, involved different groups of individuals – but there was a general sense that transit costs and affordability was a very pertinent and urgent topic. Participants were eager to contribute their perspectives, experiences, and ideas for moving forward – even though the topic of the conversation could be frustrating and sad. There was sometimes a sense of resignation that nothing can be done, because TTC fares are continually increasing and concerns of affordability have usually been dismissed. But simultaneous, there was a knowing insistence that transit affordability needs to be increased – that it is the only thing that makes sense and must happen – because it is completely unreasonable to expect anyone receiving social assistance or working for a low-wage to be able to afford the high cost of a monthly Toronto transit pass.

While the community-based research project of the Fair Fare Coalition has been valuable in addressing transit inequity in Toronto, my role as a scholar working in partnership with an activist and advocacy group has been an incredible learning opportunity. Although I understood that the time constraints of a Master's research project were not the most conducive to carrying out a participatory action research project, I was nonetheless determined to embark on this endeavor. No other approach to or method of knowledge-production could adequately stand to reflect the range of things I had learned and concerned myself with during my time at MES. Not only did I want to ensure my work would have application and relevant beyond the academy, but I sought to have the knowledge I produced as a part of my major research project grounded in the real world relationships and power dynamics, with all their messiness and complexity. The process was not always easy, and was certainly challenging – but I learned a lot from those complications and obstacles. Furthermore, I was able to help bring together a really important project that contributes valuably to the current discourse of transit in Toronto.

Working in partnership with the Fair Fare Coalition on a community-based research project has been an incredibly enriching experience that I believe has contributed to much more than my own personal learning outcomes. Its concern of transit affordability for low-income residents in Toronto is pertinent and urgent, and this research project of the FFC makes a vital contribution to this pressing issue on the basis of its research findings as well as its research process. It is an evidence-based and experience-based assertion that transit is a social justice issue in Toronto, even the social welfare elements have been ignored by, and therefore not well served by, traditional transportation planning which has been abstract, expert-led, and restricted by the political-economic conditions of neoliberal governance. This contribution of the FFC project is particularly important right now, as transit is an increasingly receiving attention in public discourse.

CONCLUSION

This report has analysed the role and significance of the Fair Fare Coalition (FFC) community-based research (CBR) project about transit affordability in Toronto. Although transit is currently a dominant topic of public debate in the city, this project sought to highlight voices and issues that are chronically missing – and are in fact marginalized – from these dominant discourses.

Fundamentally, this project has called attention to the social welfare and social justice dimensions of public transit in Toronto. While public transit performs a valuable and necessary social service, this aspect is not at the forefront of most transportation or transit-related public discourse or made a focus of decision-making on part of the City or the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). As a result, the social welfare function is not serviced well by the way in which the current system operates. While Toronto's transit system does offer social benefits, many residents are excluded from access to those benefits. This report and project emphasize barriers faced particularly on the basis of affordability of transit fares, faced especially by those who live on a low income.

The FFC's community-based research project about transit affordability in Toronto is significant in a number of ways.

Given that a great deal of municipal decision-making is expert-led – particularly with regard to a technical field such as transportation and transit planning – a community-based project focused on gathering, strengthening, and mobilizing community knowledge is a vital contribution. This research process has aimed to make space for voices and experiences that are usually marginalized from, but are heavily impacted by, official planning and decision-making processes – in this case, with regard to public transit operations in Toronto. When the official decision-making processes do not formally include evaluating the equity implications of public transit, the inequitable impacts are more heavily felt by many of the city's most vulnerable residents. The community-based research process aims to create a space for participants to share their experiences and, if they desire, to contribute to planning an event or action to attempt to bring more attention to voices and experiences that are frequently marginalized.

It contributes to scholarly literature on transit injustice in Toronto, particularly with regard to the equity implications of transit. This project brings together concerns of social welfare and public health with transportation planning under an experiential and participatory framework – a confluence which challenges the field of transportation planning not simply by introducing new data, but by also introducing and demonstrating the significance of methodologies and epistemologies that are not traditionally used in the field.

The research findings of this project address and highlight current gaps in information with regard to transit usage in Toronto, including experiential and evidence based information about transit usage by low-income residents. By finding that transit fares pose a significant barrier to accessing transit for many participants, the project points to and explores ways in which the transit system could be made more financially accessible – while also making a strong and holistic case for why this is a necessary and urgent endeavor.

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APPENDICES

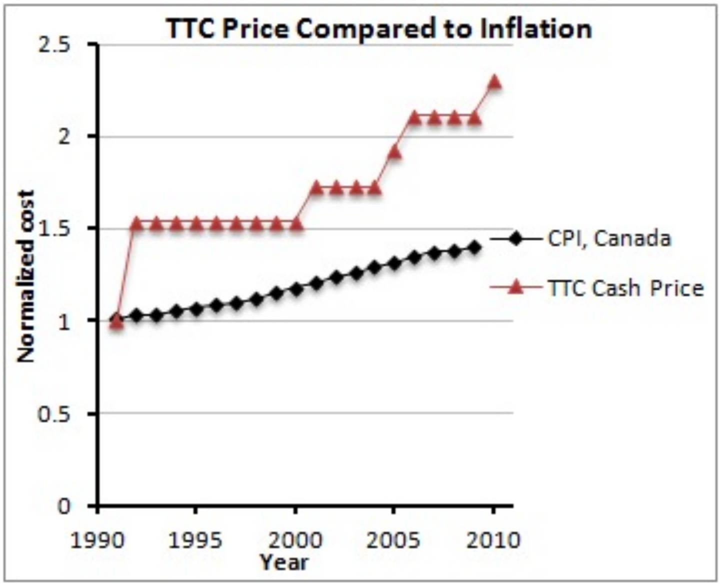
APPENDIX A: Farebox Recovery Ratio Comparison

TRANSIT SYSTEM*	OPERATING SUBSIDY ($M)	REVENUE/COST RATIO	REVENUE TRIPS (M)	SUBSIDY/ RIDER
TTC	411	73%	528	$0.78
Major U.S.				
Boston	506	38%	262	$1.93
Chicago	683	44%	407	$1.68
Los Angeles	882	29%	349	$2.53
New York	2,365	60%	2,301	$1.03
Philadelphia	527	36%	271	$1.95
Major Canadian				
Calgary	150	53%	102	$1.47
Edmonton	151	43%	83	$1.83
Montreal	478	54%	413	$1.16
Ottawa	163	51%	101	$1.62
Vancouver	380	54%	235	$1.62
Local Canadian				
Brampton	52	45%	18	$2.82
Durham Region	36	37%	10	$3.46
Hamilton	38	48%	22	$1.76
Mississauga	77	49%	35	$2.21
York Region	100	33%	22	$4.49

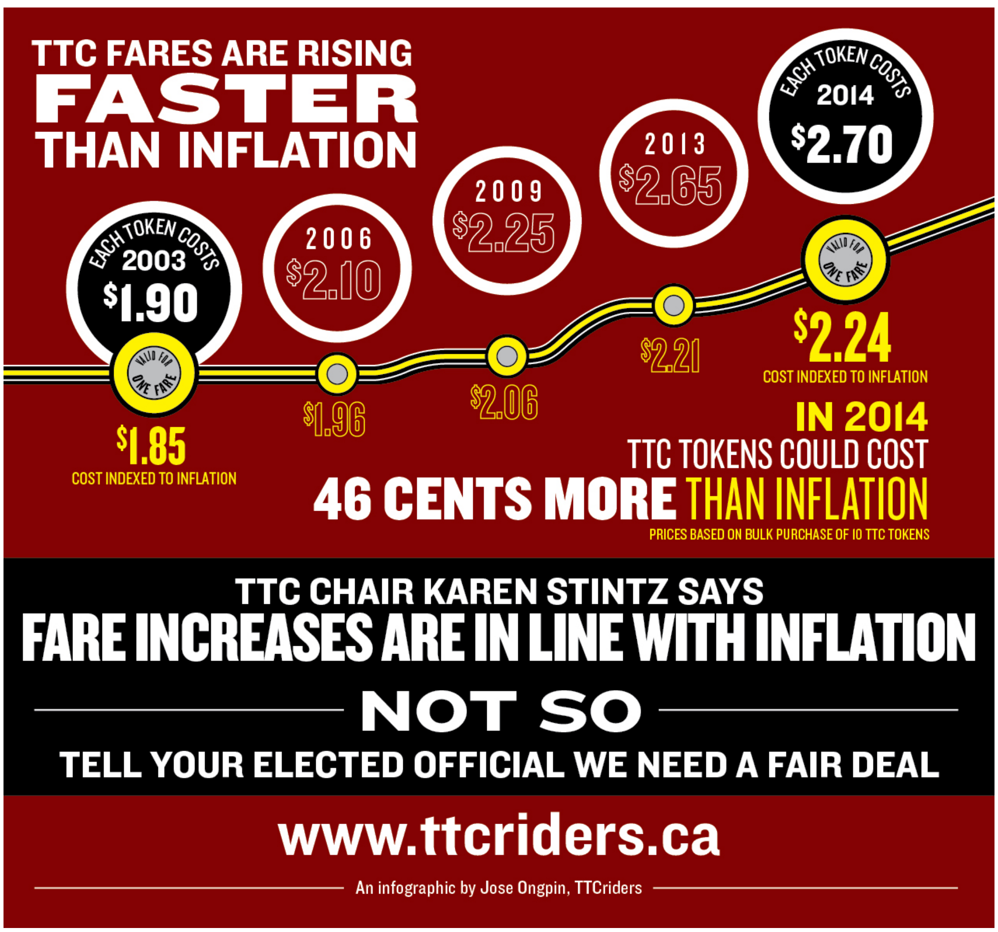
*TTC data = 2013 Budget; Major U.S. = 2011; Major and Local Canadian = 2012;

Toronto Transit Commission (2013). 2014 TTC and Wheel-Trans Operating Budgets. Retrieved from http://ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2013/November_18/Reports/2014_TTC_AND_WHEEL_T.pdf

APPENDIX B: TTC Fares and Inflation

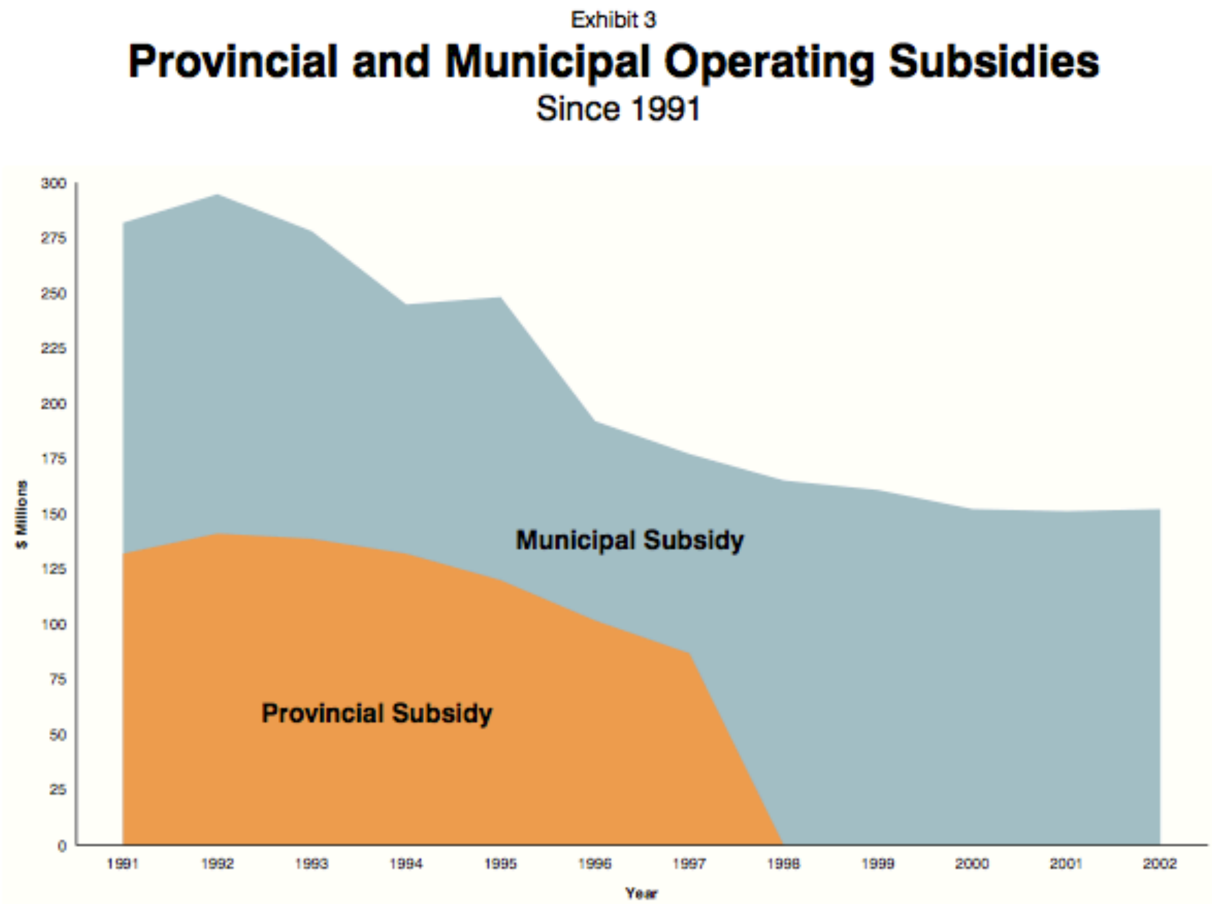


From Wikipedia



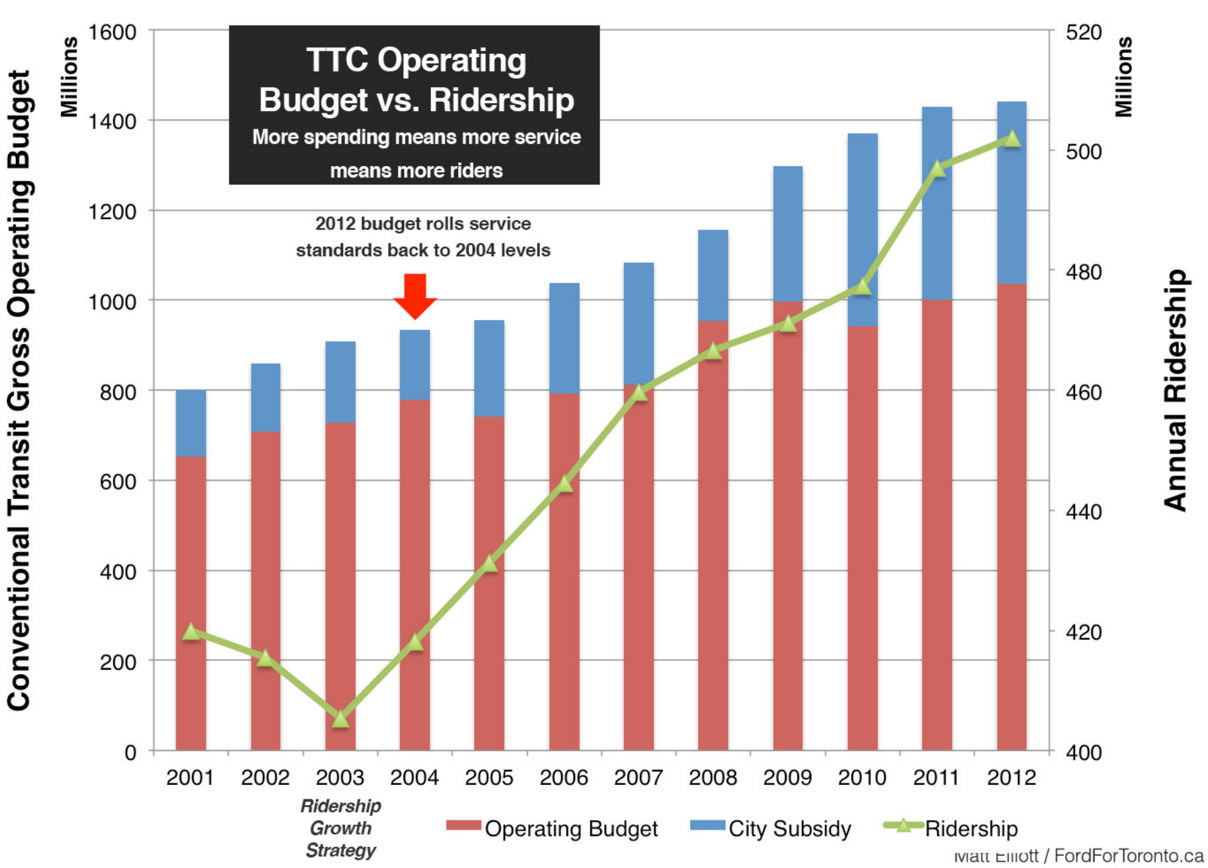
From ttcriders.ca

APPENDIX C: Government Subsidies



Source: http://fordfortoronto.mattelliott.ca/2011/12/06/too-much-ridership/

(APPENDIX C continued on follow page)



Source: http://fordfortoronto.mattelliott.ca/2011/12/06/too-much-ridership/

2014 TTC and Wheel-Trans Operating Budgets **Page 10**

Year	Subsidy Budget	Ridership Budget	TTC Subsidy per Rider
2010	$430M	462M	$0.93
2011	$429M	487M	$0.88
2012	$411M	503M	$0.82
2013	$411M	528M	$0.78
2014	$428M	540M	$0.79

Toronto municipal government subsidy to TTC from 2010-2014, as outlined by the 2014 TTC Wheel-Trans Operating Budget.

APPENDIX D: Policing Fare Evasion

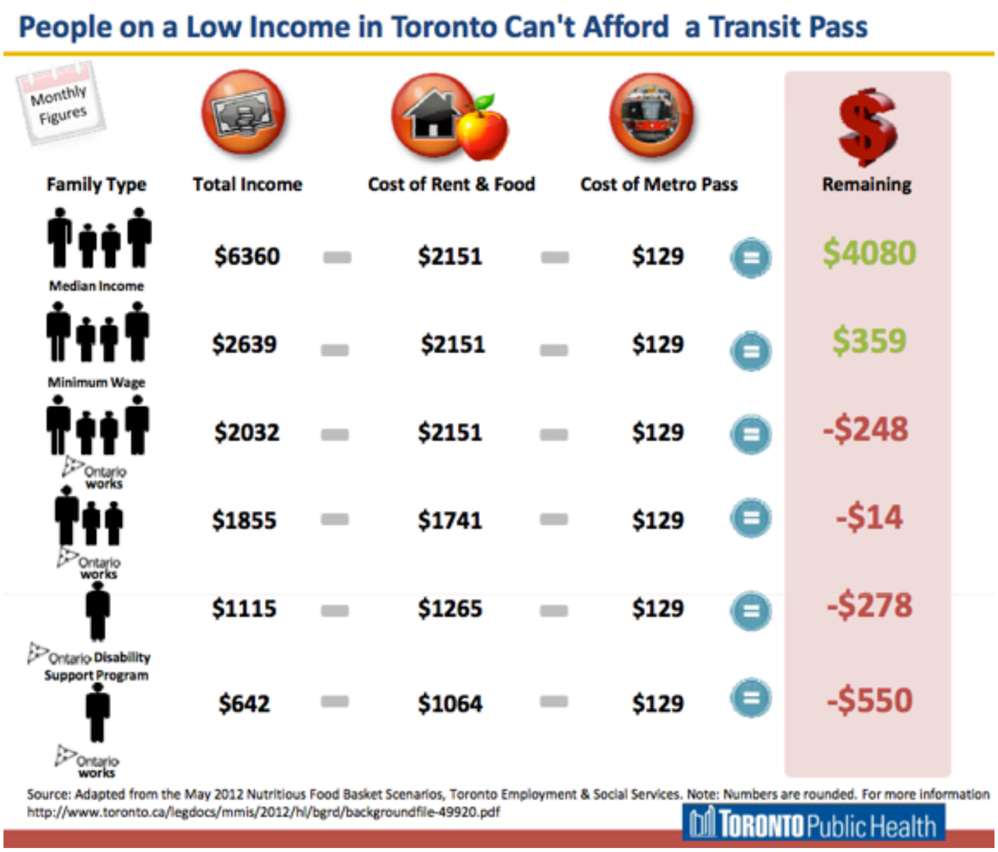
A TTC poster about fare evasion that has been altered with marker.

Source: The Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly's Free & Accessible Campaign Facebook page.

APPENDIX E: Unaffordable TTC Fares

Figure 4: Transit Affordability (Cost of Monthly Transit Pass as a Percent of Monthly Minimum Wage Income), Select Canadian Cities/ Municipalities, 2009

Notes: (1) Figure includes Quality of Life Reporting System members with populations (2006) greater than 500,000.
Source: Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Quality of Life Reporting System. Ottawa, Ontario.
Prepared by: Toronto Public Health, May 2012.



*** note: the monthly pass fare has been increased to $133.75 in 2014**

Both figures from Toronto Public Health (2013). Next Stop Health: Transit Access and Health Inequities in Toronto.

APPENDIX F: Low-Income Pass Programs in Other Jurisdictions

Table 2: Addressing Public Transit Affordability – Monthly Municipal Discount Transit Passes

City/Region	Eligibility	Cost Reduction
Region of Waterloo Transit for Reduced Income Program	Adults with an income below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO).	The transit pass is reduced by 44% and costs $35.
Transit Assistance Pass Program	OW recipients who are upgrading their education	The transit pass is provided free of charge.
Windsor Affordable Pass Program	Students and adults with an income below the LICO who are working	The transit pass is reduced by 27% for students and 49% for adults and costs $40.
Hamilton Affordable Transit Pass Program	Adults with incomes below the LICO who are working	The transit pass is reduced by 50% and costs $43.50.
Kingston Affordable Transit Pass Program	Youth, adults, and seniors with incomes below the LICO.	The transit pass is reduced by 32% and costs $34.25, $46.50 and $31.50 respectively.
Calgary Low Income Monthly Transit Pass Program	Adults with incomes below 75% of the LICO.	The transit pass is reduced by 57% and costs $40.
Guelph (Pilot) Affordable Bus Pass Program	Youth, adults and seniors with incomes below the Low Income Measure in mid-2012.	The transit pass will be reduced by 50% and cost $31, $36 and $30 respectively.
York Region (Pilot) Discount Transit Pass	OW and ODSP recipients who are working.	The transit pass will be reduced by 50% and cost $57.50.

Source: Dempster & Tucs, 2012

Next Stop Health: Transit Access and Health Inequities in Toronto I Toronto Public Health, March, 2013
18

APPENDIX G: Questionnaire

A > Types of transportation (How do you get places):

1) What is your main mode of transportation in daily life? (circle one)
Transit/TTC   Driving   Walking   Cycling   Other: ___________

2) Does your household own a car? Yes / No (circle one)

3) Do you use public transit? Yes / No (circle one)

B > When do you use public transit?

4) How often do you use public transit? (check one that describes best)

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Very rarely
- ☐ Never

5) When do you use public transit most frequently? (check all that apply)

Weekdays:

- ☐ 6:00 am – 9:00 am
- ☐ 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
- ☐ 3:00 pm – 7:00 pm
- ☐ 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm
- ☐ 10:00 pm – 1:00 am
- ☐ 1:00 am – 6:00 am

Weekends:

- ☐ 6:00 am – 8:00 am
- ☐ 8:00 am – 12 noon
- ☐ 12 noon – 7:00 pm
- ☐ 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm
- ☐ 1:00am – 6:00 am

C > Where do you go using public transit?

6) Do you use more than one transit system? (Do you use public transit aside from the TTC, for example: GO Transit, Mississauga Transit, Viva, etc?)

- ☐ Yes – Frequently
- ☐ Yes – Sometimes
- ☐ Yes – But rarely

- ☐ No – Never

7) What are some common destinations that you go to – *by any transportation method (walking, bicycle, TTC, car, etc)* – in your daily life? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Work (either paid or volunteer work)
- ☐ School or educational programs
- ☐ Medical or doctor's appointments
- ☐ Legal services
- ☐ Food (grocery shopping, food banks, or community meals)
- ☐ Social service agencies or programs
- ☐ Recreation or leisure
- ☐ Social – visiting family or friends
- ☐ Other (Please specify): ______________________________

8) Which destinations do you use public transit to reach? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Work (either paid or volunteer work)
- ☐ School or educational programs
- ☐ Medical or doctor's appointments
- ☐ Legal services
- ☐ Food (grocery shopping, food banks, or community meals)
- ☐ Social service agencies or programs
- ☐ Recreation or leisure
- ☐ Social – visiting family or friends
- ☐ Other (Please specify): ______________________________

9) Are there types of destinations (from the above list) that you <u>cannot</u> access by public transit?

a) Which ones? ____

b) Why not? Is it because of cost, because the transit does not go there, or for some other reason? ____

____

D > Paying for public transit

10) If you use public transit, what method of fare do you most frequently use? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Cash fare
- ☐ Tickets / tokens
- ☐ Tickets / tokens supplied by an agency
- ☐ Day pass
- ☐ Weekly pass
- ☐ Monthly pass

11) Why do you use this method of fare payment? ________________________________

____

12) If you use a monthly or weekly pass, do you share it with anyone? Yes / No
13) On average, how much do you spend on public transit per month?

- ☐ Under $20
- ☐ $20 - 49
- ☐ $50 - 79
- ☐ $80 – 99
- ☐ $100 +

14) Are some trips that you make more expensive than others? (For example, do you travel with family members, have to visit multiple destinations and pay multiple fares, etc?) **Please describe.**

____
____
____

15) Have you ever had to be strategic with a TTC transfer in order to reduce costs of a transit trip? (for example, use a transfer you've found, use a transfer outside of the time and/or location where it is valid, etc?) **Please describe.**

____
____
____

E > Income / capacity to pay

16) What is your average *monthly* household income? *

(If you have a family member [partner, spouse, parent, child, etc] who contributes to your finances, you can include their income. If not, answer just for yourself.)

- ☐ **under $500** (under $6,000 per year)
- ☐ **$500 - $1000** ($6,000 – 12,000 per year)
- ☐ **$1000 – $1500** ($12,000 – 18,000 per year)
- ☐ **$1500 - $2000** ($18,000 – 24,000 per year)
- ☐ **$2000 – 2500** ($24,000 – 30,000 per year)
- ☐ **over $2500** (over $30,000 per year)

*** If you do not know your monthly income, you can use this space to write your hourly wage, and number of hours worked per week: ________________**

16a) Does this amount include a family member's income? Yes / No (circle one)

16b) Including yourself, how many family members' expenses are paid for with this income? ____

17) Do you receive Social Assistance? Yes / No (circle one)

17a) Which form of social assistance do you receive? (circle one)
Ontario Works / ODSP / Other:________________________

18) Are you a student? Yes / No (circle one)

18a) Are you eligible for the student discounted metropass (a full-time student at an approved secondary or post-secondary institution)? Yes / No

F > Moving forward

19) Have you ever needed transit on a heat alert, cold alert or smog alert day to get to a cooling or heating station? Yes / No

-- If yes, please describe: ____

____

20) Have you been affected by the cuts in recent years to how many tokens drop-ins and other agencies can provide? Have you ever tried to get tokens from a drop-in or agency and been unable to? Yes / No (circle one)

20a) Would it help you if drop-ins could provide more tokens?
Yes / No / Not Sure

21) How would your daily life change if you didn't have to be concerned with the cost of transit access?
(For example: Where could you go? What could you afford to do otherwise?)

____

____

____

22) Do you think a discounted monthly transit pass would be useful to you?
Yes / No / Maybe (circle one)

23) Given your current monthly income and expenses, is there an amount you could budget each month for a discounted transit pass? $_____________________(enter dollar amount)

24) How much of a barrier to your daily mobility is the cost of transit, on a scale of 1 to 10? (with 1 meaning that cost of transit is not a problem at all, and 10 meaning that cost of transit is a very big problem for you that prevents you from doing many things)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

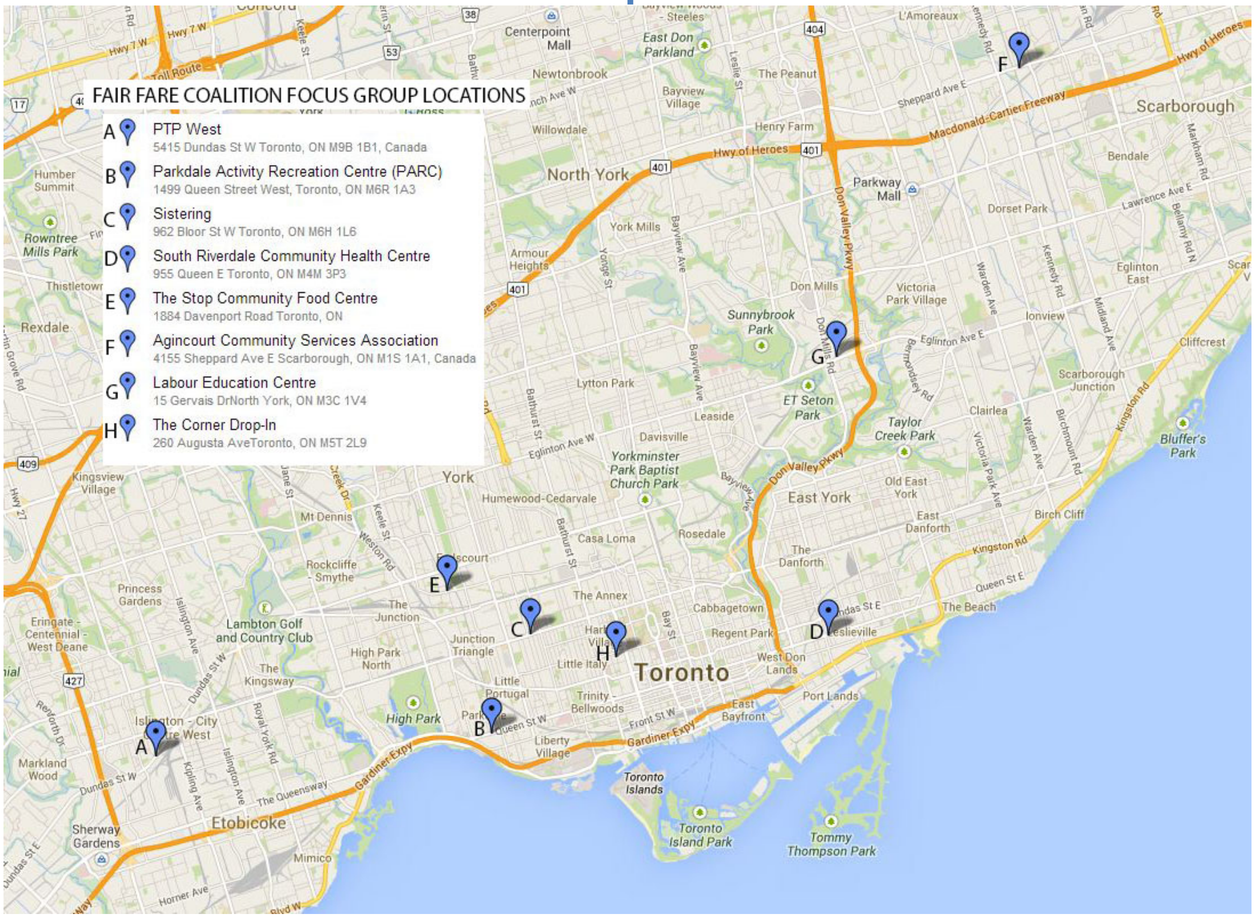
25) If you could change one thing about public transit in Toronto, what would it be?

____

____

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire!

APPENDIX H: FFC Focus Group Location



APPENDIX I: Research Invite

*The **Fair Fare Coalition** is an advocacy organization concerned about the impact that the high cost of riding the TTC has on the physical health and economic, mental and emotional well-being of people in Toronto.*

This research will be coordinated by York MES candidate, Stefanie Hardman, who can be reached at stef.hardman@gmail.com or 416-520-8141.

Research aims and goals

The Fair Fare Coalition is currently seeking community partners and participants for a **research project on the impacts of transit costs** on people's daily lives, particularly low-income community members who may face challenges with transit's costs. We aim to produce a report that compiles stories and experiences from across the city, speaking to the variety of impacts of transit costs.

We aim to complete this report by September 2014. We are inviting participants to take part in the research and, if interested, contribute ideas towards an event that will launch the release of the report.

Research sessions

We are looking to hold **90-minute long** focus group sessions, in which participants will engage in discussion and creative exercises.

We are hoping you could help us to gather **5-15 people** who earn a **low-income** and would be interested to attend a session about transit costs and its impacts. An **honourarium** of 2 tokens and a $5 grocery voucher will be provided to each participant.

We are hoping **you can host** this session on site at your organization, provided you have available room, so only the research team has to travel. Please let us know if you do or do not have room to host a session, so that we can make necessary arrangements.

We would also like to have **snacks and beverages** available for these sessions. If your organization is able to provide refreshments, please let us know.

> These sessions will take place in **English**, in both spoken and written formats – if you feel this may pose a barrier for interested participants, please let us know so we can work together to accommodate needs and make these sessions as accessible as possible.

We are looking to begin this work as soon as possible, and will be arranging dates with various organizations throughout **March** and **April**. If you are interested in

RSVP

- ***Please let us know the answers to the above questions by filling out our online form at http://bit.ly/FFC-transit-research***

APPENDIX J: Data Charts

Fig. 1: Average monthly household income

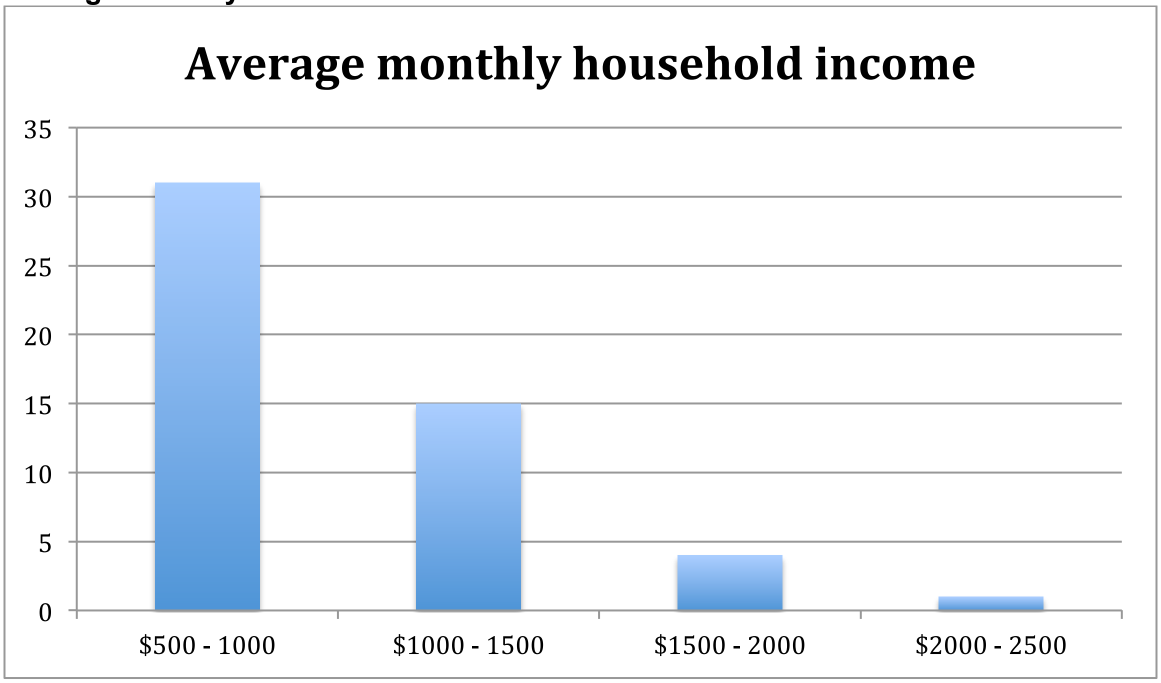


Fig. 2: Main mode of transportation

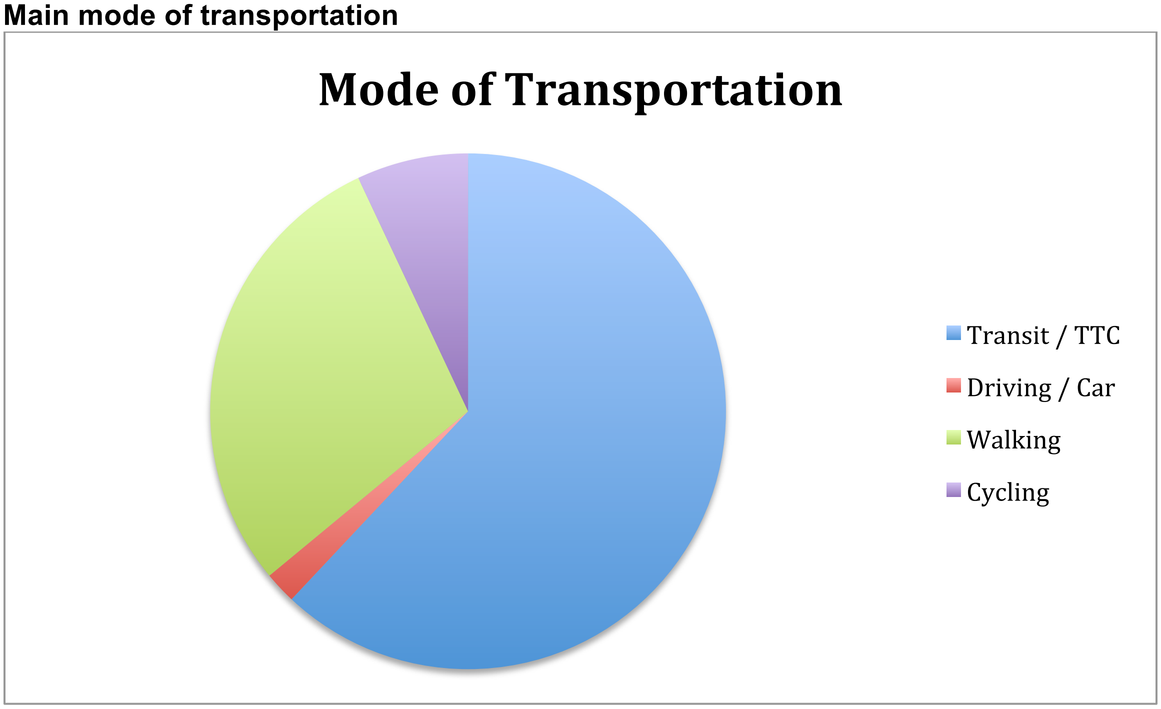


Fig. 3: Household car ownership

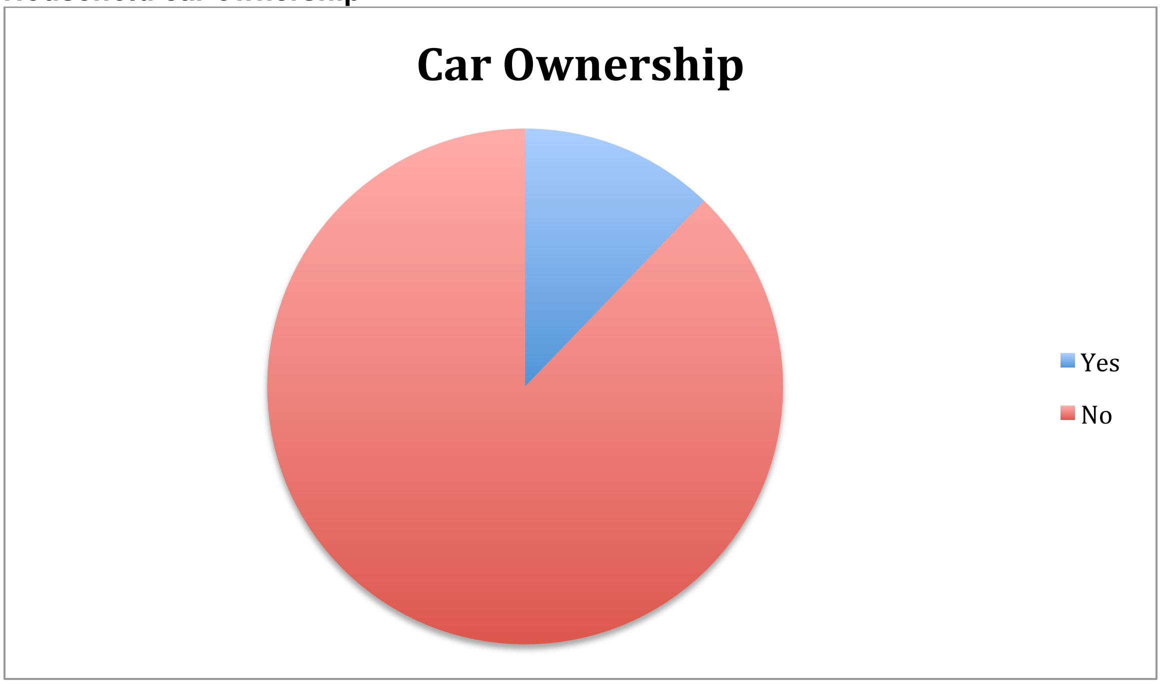


Fig. 4: Frequency of Transit Usage

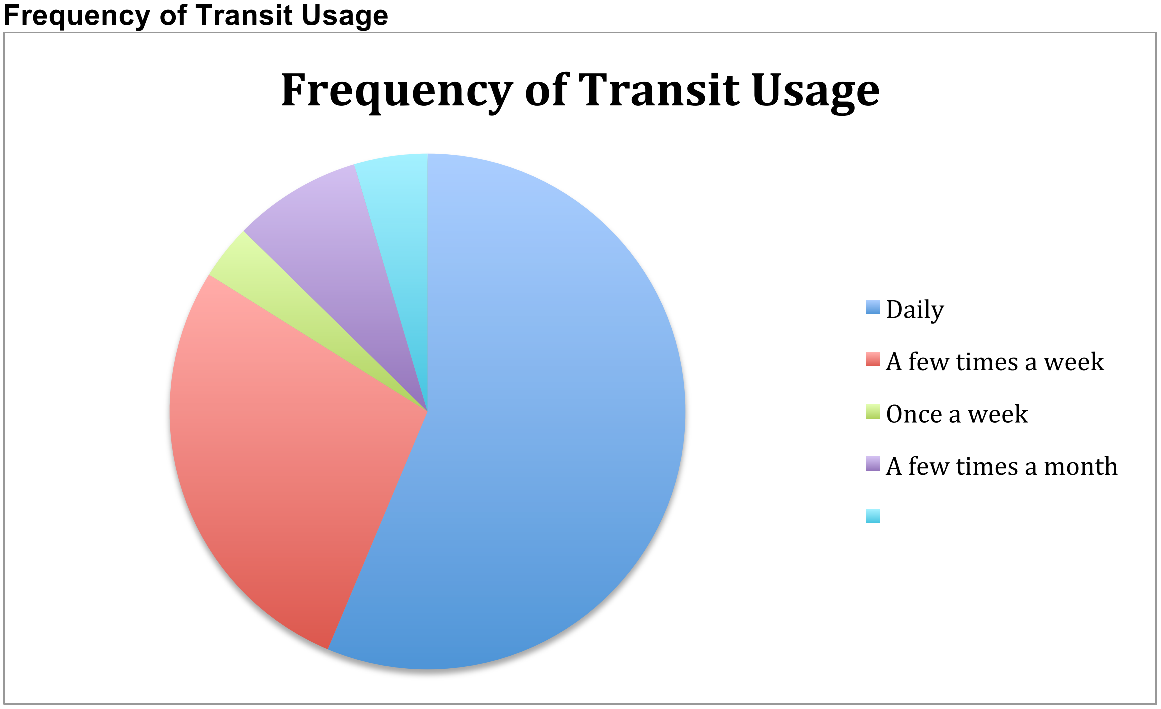


Fig. 5: Time of Day of Transit Travel

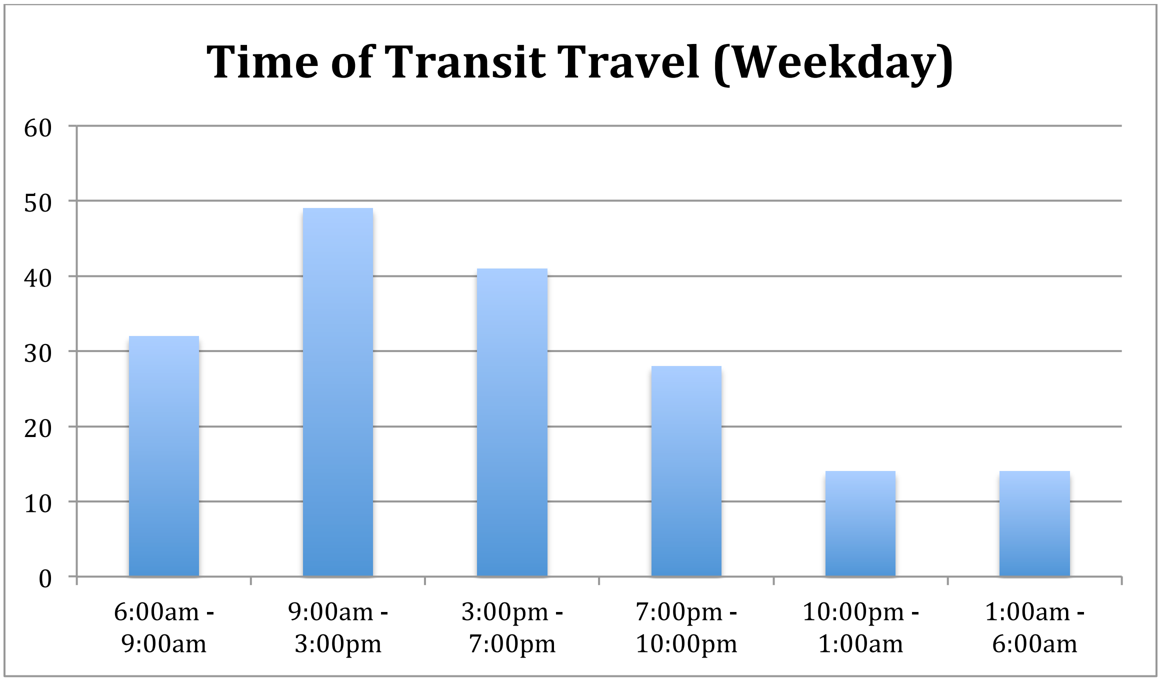


Fig. 6: Destinations reached by transit

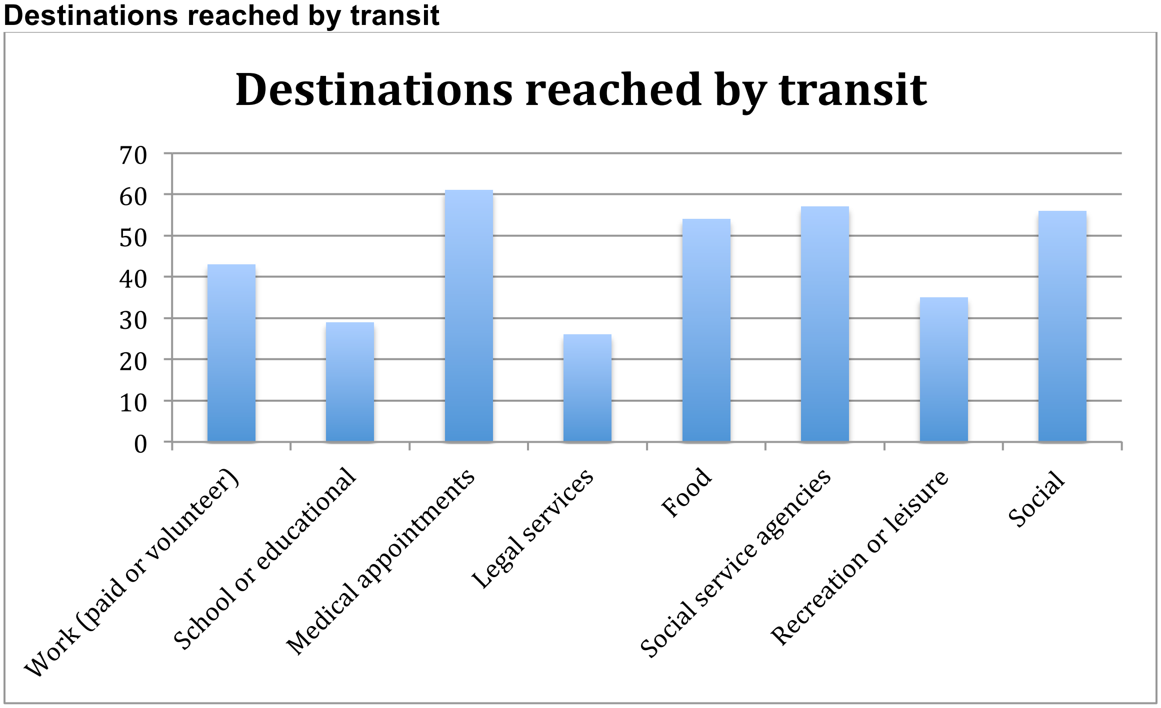
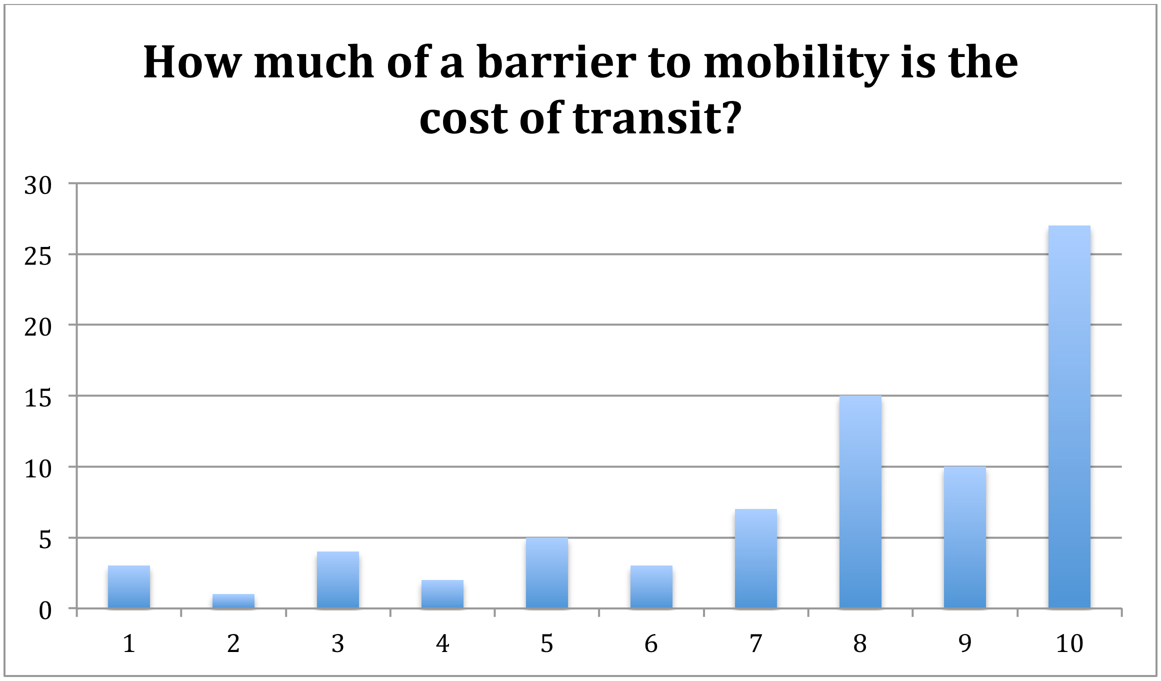


Fig. 7: Cost of transit as a barrier to mobility



On a scale of 1 or 10, with 1 meaning “not at all” and 10 meaning cost is a big problem that prevents one from doing very many things.

Average = 7.76
Median = 8
Mode = 10
More than half of the participants (52 respondents, 60%) selected between 8 and 10.

Fig. 8: Estimated monthly spending on transit

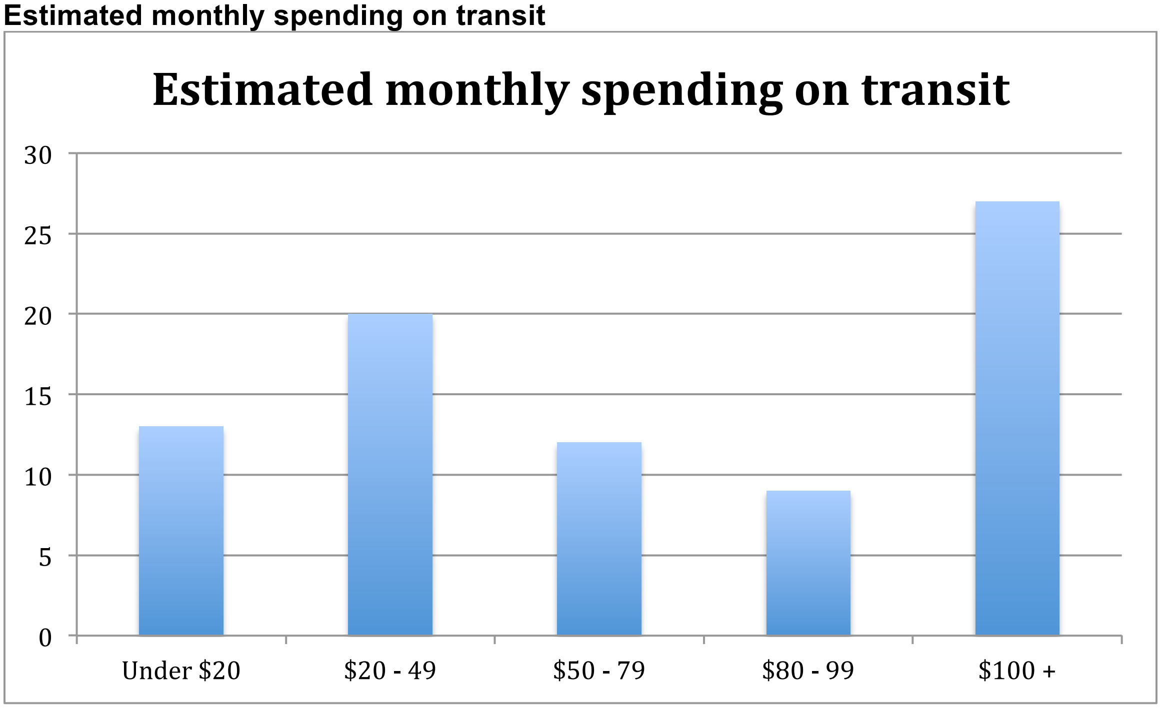


Fig. 9: Usefuless of a low-income discounted pass

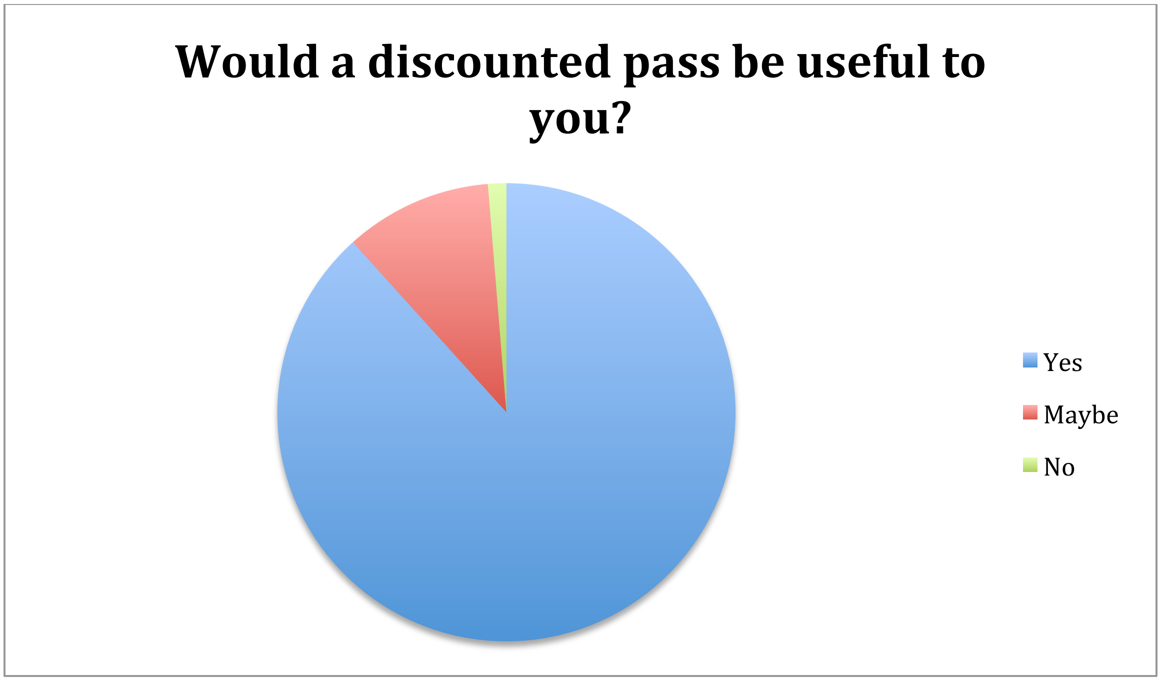


Fig. 10: Have you ever needed transit on a heat alert, cold alert or smog alert day to get to a cooling or heating station?

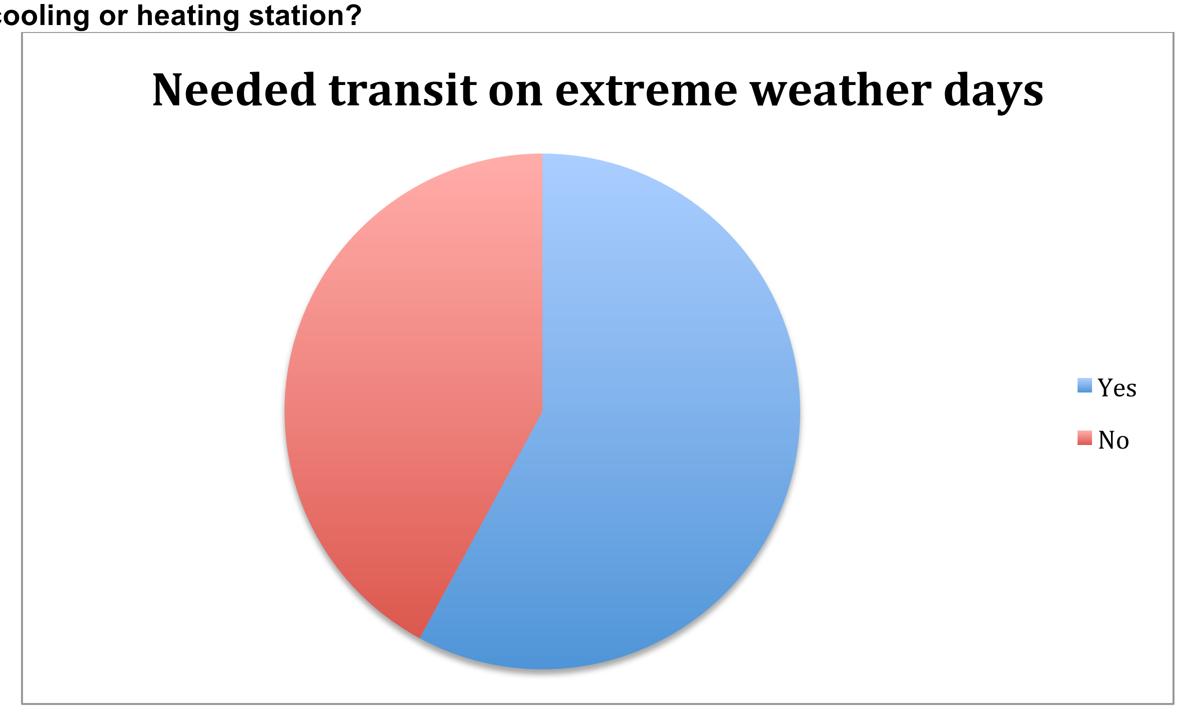
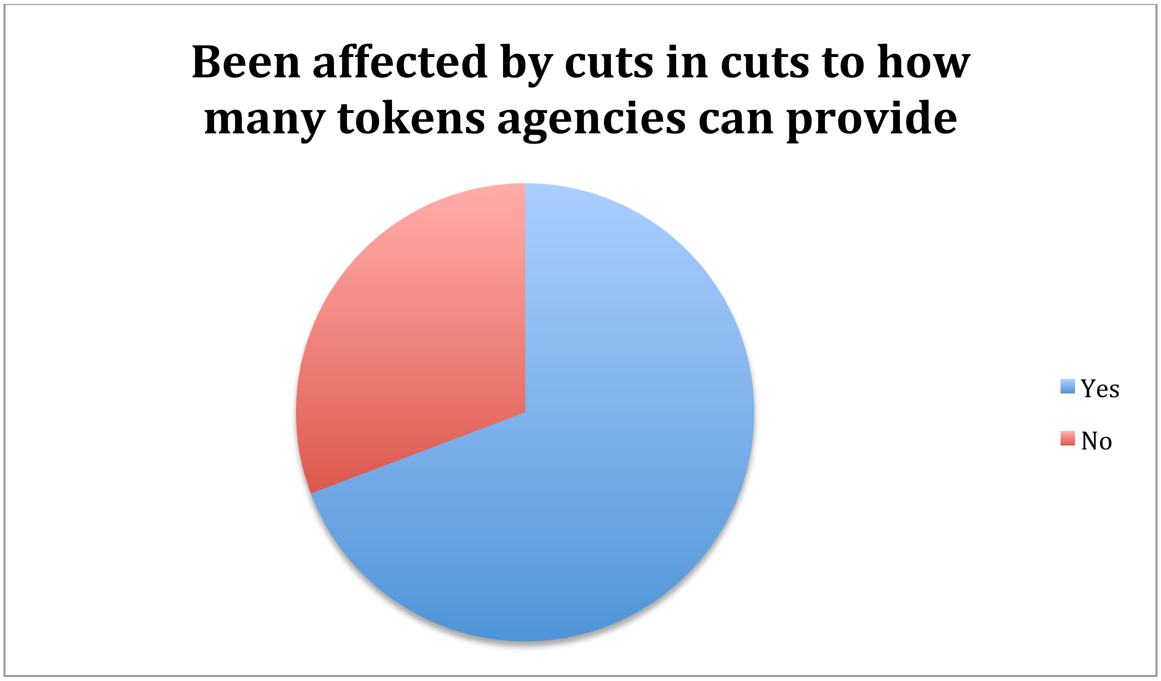


Fig. 11: Have you been affected by the cuts in recent years to how many tokens drop-ins and other agencies can provide? Have you ever tried to get tokens from a drop-in or agency and been unable to?


Been affected by cuts in cuts to how many tokens agencies can provide
Yes
No

APPENDIX K: Research Summary Leaflet

The Fair Fare Coalition's Community-Based Research Project on the Costs of Transit in Toronto

Thank you for participating in the Fair Fare Coalition's community-based research project investigating the costs of transit in Toronto and ways to make transit more affordable!

What is the Fair Fare Coalition (FFC)?

Formed in response to a substantial fare hike in 2010, the Fair Fare Coalition is a network of social service agencies, community organizations, and residents who are concerned about the impact that the high cost of riding the TTC has on the physical health and economic, mental, and emotional well-being of people in Toronto.

What are the Fair Fare Coalition's goals?

The Fair Fare Coalition's goals are a physically and economically accessible public transit system including:

- Low income subsidized pass
- Free transit during heat and cold alerts
- Discount to agencies who bulk buy tokens for free distribution

What is the Fair Fare Coalition's Community-Based Research Project?

The FFC wanted to follow up on its previous report, *"No Fair Box: Comments from Toronto Communities on TTC Fare Increases and Services,"* where a replica TTC fare box was sent around to 13 sites, including drop-in centres, health care centres, and community centres, throughout the GTA. People were invited to write comments about what the 2010 fare increase meant to them and the importance of public transit in their lives. We collected 237 comments in English, Spanish, and Mandarin.

The current research project includes *you*! The Fair Fare Coalition wanted to begin an ongoing conversation about the impacts of transit costs, and generate ideas about ways to help make transit more affordable in Toronto.

From March to May of 2014, we held eight 90-minute long focus group sessions involving nearly 100 participants, in various community organizations and social service agencies throughout Toronto, including: PTP; the Stop (Bread & Bricks group); Labour Education Centre (LEC); the Corner Drop-In (St. Stephen's Community House); Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA); Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC); Sistering; South Riverdale Community Health Centre (Health & Strength Action Group).

In addition to the fruitful conversation, we conducted a 25-question questionnaire completed by 86 participants. The following are the results from the questionnaire.

<u>Summary of Findings</u>

Transit is a main mode of transportation. It is used at all times of the day to reach a wide variety of destinations.

- All respondents are public transit users, and it is the main mode of transportation for the majority of respondents. Most respondents **do not have a car**, nor do their households.
- The large majority of respondents could be considered **very frequent users of public transit**. More than half of respondents use public transit daily. Many use it a few times a week.
- Respondents **travel on transit at all times of the day**. About half of respondents report to frequently travel during "peak hours" in both the morning and the afternoon.
- Respondents travel to, and use public transit to reach, a **wide variety of destinations**. The most commonly highlighted destination was 'medical or doctor's appointments' – followed by 'social service agencies or programs' and 'food'.

Paying for public transit is costly. Cost is a significant barrier to transit usage and to daily mobility.

- **Tokens** were the most common fare payment method used. Cost and affordability was by far the most common reason respondents used the fare payment method that they did. **Not many respondents currently use a monthly pass** as their main fare method. Many respondents estimated **spending over $100 per month on transit**.
- Cost of transit was the most common barrier that prevented respondents from reaching certain destinations. Many stated that social destinations—visiting family or friends—were **destinations they could not reach due to cost**. When asked how much of a barrier transit cost represented to daily mobility, respondents indicated that it was a big problem that **prevented them from doing many things**.
- **Some trips are more expensive than others**, due to trips that involve multiple destinations, problems with the transfer system, or travelling with family members.

Responses that relate to Fair Fare Coalition's goals:

- While there were nineteen participants who were students, **none of them were eligible for the student discounted metropass**.
- About half of participants noted that they have needed transit on a **heat alert, cold alert**, or smog alert day to get to a heating or cooling station.
- More than half of the participants identified that they had been affected by **cuts in recent years to how many tokens drop-ins and agencies can provide** in the sense that they have tried to get tokens but have been unable to. Even more than half felt it would be helpful if drop-ins and agencies could provide more tokens.
- **Discounted low-income pass**:
    - A significant majority (79%) of respondents thought a discounted pass would be useful to them personally. There were a handful of people who might potentially find it useful. Only one respondent answered no.
    - Cost of the pass: while the responses ranged in amount, the most common response and the average was **$50 per month**.