




Hamilton

# INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Public Works Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	December 2, 2024
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Changes to Bus Detour Communications (PW24086) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
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<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## COUNCIL DIRECTION

N/A

## INFORMATION

The purpose of this report is to provide information on forthcoming changes to bus detour communication. The Transit Division is launching a process that leverages the City of Hamilton’s Open Data program. When activated by Transit staff, it will trigger the release of detours or service disruptions in real-time through third-party trip planning tools. This process change will make critical service information available to customers in a timely manner.

### Background

Transit is best known for its fixed route scheduled service. Any changes to the expected pattern of service can be highly disruptive to customers and create a negative customer experience if expected arrival times or missed transfer connections happen. However, service disruptions can happen in public transit for many reasons. In response, Transit must adjust service accordingly, and this can include temporarily deviating from the planned route. When this happens, timely and accurate notification for customers is very important.

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OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

Service changes can either be planned or unplanned. Planned detours are those which are known in advance, such as major construction projects, events or street festivals. Unplanned service disruptions cannot be controlled and can happen at any time, such as traffic accidents or watermain breaks. Changes to regular transit routes cause confusion for customers as route modifications can impact bus stop locations and scheduled timing.

Planned detour information is posted on Transit's website and to its social media channels, including X (Twitter), Meta and Instagram. When service disruptions happen, Transit's top priority is always the safety of staff and customers. Operations staff coordinate with other City of Hamilton divisions including emergency personnel before a detour is established. Once Transit is sure everyone is safe and has a detour plan in place, the message is first communicated to on-road staff and then to customers. Service disruptions are posted manually to X by office staff only during standard business hours, Monday to Friday. Transit also ensures the safety and well-being of customers during major unforeseen service disruptions by having operations staff on site.

#### Upcoming Enhancements

Transit is improving the way it communicates detours, both planned and unplanned, by leveraging the General Transit Specification Feed (GTFS) hosted by the City's Open Data program. Transit staff will use real-time alert tools in the Computer Aided Dispatch/Automatic Vehicle Locator (CAD/AVL) system to enter the detour information for both planned detours and unplanned service disruptions. The alert tool will notify Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) customers of service disruptions in real-time through third-party trip planning tools that use the GTFS real-time alert, such as Transit App and Google Transit, by pushing information from Transit's CAD/AVL to open data.

The shift supports the City's objective to leverage technology for seamless customer service. This initiative also aligns with the Digital Strategy's focus on keeping the public informed, building trust through enhanced access to critical information.

By leveraging the tool within the CAD/AVL, Transit then uses a single technology solution to automatically feed internal and external communication channels at the same time. Since the information is entered directly into the CAD/AVL system as a single step, Operations staff are able to directly update customers about detours during all service hours, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. This is a significant change in timeliness of notifications for users of the third-party apps.

Transit conservatively estimates approximately 70,000 customers are already using third-party apps for HSR trip planning and bus arrival information. Adding the real-time detour alert will provide more accurate and timely information to customers and

enhance accessibility as third-party apps offer features that support persons with disabilities. These third-party apps are free to users and are widely available.

Using one-step automatic publishing of detour information to the City's Open Data program will allow a shift away from manual processes. This approach will allow Transit to streamline communication, with better ongoing support for digital products to enhance the way information is delivered. Transit will no longer post unplanned service disruptions to X. Posting these to X is a stand-alone manual process as there is no automated method to publish to X, so these must be manually done by staff each time. Given the fluid nature of transit, time lag, and opportunities for errors, manually posting to X can create a poor customer experience.

Transit customers increasingly rely on third party apps like Google Transit and Transit App to plan their trips and for notifications. Third-party apps are largely free to download and use and they also provide the ability to plan trips across cities and regions. The volume of HSR customers using third-party apps already outpaces customers using X by nearly eight to one.

By adding real-time alert information to GTSF feeds, more Transit customers will have access to real-time trip planning information, including disruptions, when they need it.

#### Planned Launch

Transit is ready to launch the new real-time GTSF alert feature on January 2, 2025. A communication campaign has been developed for Transit's social channels and messaging will be introduced in mid-December to give customers a two-week notification period. Customers will be informed of the new real-time alert feature through social media, website, in-bus signage, Bus News, and in-person outreach efforts.

Planned detours will be entered into the system starting in early December, and some planned detours may appear before the official January start as staff familiarize themselves with new processes. Work instructions and training has already taken place.

#### Conclusion

By using real-time GTSF alerts, Transit will deliver timely, accessible, and reliable service information to more HSR customers during all service hours. Customers will be better able to plan their trips and will receive direct alerts in their third-party app in real-time.

Transit continues to monitor service communication performance and tools and remains committed to continuous improvement efforts that improve the customer experience.

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES**

N/A