



City of Hamilton Report for Information

To: Chair and Members
General Issues Committee

Date: July 9, 2025

Report No: PW25045

Subject/Title: Digital Tools to Enhance Public Safety
(Outstanding Business List)

Ward(s) Affected: City Wide

Recommendations

That Report PW25045, respecting Digital Tools to Enhance Public Safety, **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on digital tools to enhance public safety for Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) customers.
- A transit safety mobile application (“app”) is a tool used by some transit agencies within a broader safety program that is supported by significant security staff or resources.
- Investing in a transit safety app could be considered in the future as part of a broader safety program but would require investments in system-wide security resources to directly respond to serious safety threats on transit.
- The Transit Division continues to monitor and take steps to improve public safety and remains committed to continuous improvement efforts to ensure transit is safe for all.

Financial Considerations

There is no budgetary impact or financial impact to the recommendation.

Background

At the September 21, 2022 General Issues Committee meeting (GIC 22-018, Item 12.2), Council directed staff, including the departments of Digital Innovation, Public Works (including Transit), Communications, to develop a plan for the implementation of a transit safety app, either as a stand-alone tool, or included as a feature in the existing HSR app and report back to General Issues Committee with options for the implementation.

Analysis

Safety is a top priority for staff and customers, and the Transit Division acknowledges that a sense of safety is a key metric in rider satisfaction. Safety incidents range from accidents, to threatening verbal or non-verbal interactions, to serious criminal activities. The Transit Division is committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment for all.

An update on HSR's safety efforts was presented to Council on April 3, 2023 (Report PW23025), following the launch of HSR's Speak Up Speak Out awareness campaign. This campaign encourages customers to call 911 for emergencies and posters provide a quick response (QR) code that links customers to an online form to report non-emergencies to Hamilton Police.

A transit safety app is a safety tool used by some transit agencies, but it is always part of a broader safety program supported by dedicated security staff. A scan of the 20 largest transit agencies in Canada reveal that only two offer an app to report safety concerns: Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and Brampton Transit.

Both TTC and Brampton Transit have safety reporting apps that allow customers to report incidents to transit control in real-time. Transit control or corporate security is then able to send resources to the bus or the transit terminal. Toronto's response team is made up of 85 Special Constables and 15 Staff Sergeants and Superintendents (reported in 2023). Brampton Transit's safety response team is made up of 71 full-time contract guards and 21 full-time in-house uniformed members. Both agencies also have additional safety features at major terminals and stations.

Current State of HSR

In September 2020, HSR launched a real-time trip-planning app called HSRnow which works on Apple and Android devices. The app was co-developed with HSR's long-standing transit software vendor, but remains offline due to the 2024 cyber event. Customers can use free third-party trip-planning apps such as Google Transit or Transit App.

The HSRnow app does not provide safety features. A preliminary investigation with the vendor revealed that adding a single feature to call 911 is not feasible due to the risk of accidental 911 calls. Mitigating this risk would require extensive and costly measures and is not recommended as an alternative to customers calling 911 directly.

Although other app options could be explored, the City of Hamilton would first require a system-wide security program, including resources, to respond to safety threats on transit.

Conclusion

Investing in a transit safety app could be a reasonable support tool but should be a part of a system-wide security response program to directly respond to serious safety threats on transit, and would require significant security staff and resources.

The Transit Division continues to monitor and take steps to improve public safety. A few examples of ongoing and upcoming safety activities include:

- Third-party security guard services are present at the Frank A. Cooke transit terminal. The security vendor is managed under contract by the City's Corporate Facilities and Energy Management division. The security guards provide a presence at the terminal property 24 hours a day through technology observation and patrols. They also request emergency services such as medical, fire and law enforcement on behalf of the City.
- Monitoring of customer satisfaction scores for safety, measured by responses to the question "I felt safe during my trip", to ensure the minimum target is met and any concerns are flagged for review and response. Safety scores were 86% in 2024 and 85% in 2023, which exceeded the minimum 80% target for good performance.
- Investigating all reported safety concerns and taking immediate action such as reporting crimes to Hamilton Police Services.
- Incorporating elements of Canadian Urban Transit Association's Transit Code, into HSR's ongoing safety and etiquette campaigns. Transit Code is a national customer education campaign built on three key pillars: safety, courtesy and respect.
- Participating in the Council directed Gender-Based Safety Audit, led by the YWCA, which provides insights into improvements to the physical environment to remove hazards and improve feelings of safety for women, girls and gender-diverse individuals.
- Participating in the Community Safety and Well-Being Data Strategy Working Group and sharing HSR customer survey scores in support of the Corporate Community Safety and Well-Being Strategy.

Safety is a top priority, and the Transit Division remains committed to continuous improvement efforts to ensure transit is safe for all. While the implementation of an app as a standalone tool is not recommended at this time, it can be considered as part of a future transit focused safety plan, as transit in Hamilton grows.

Alternatives

As this is an Information Report, there are no alternatives to the information presented.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

1. Safe & Thriving Neighbourhoods
 - 2.2. Make sure people can safely and efficiently move around by foot, bike, transit or car
2. Responsiveness & Transparency
 - 2.1. Prioritize customer service and proactive communication

The Transit Division honours its guiding principle of belonging, which includes the target outcome “everyone has a right to feel welcome and safe while using transit”. The Transit Division’s ongoing safety approach includes technology tools such as cameras onboard buses, responding to safety concerns using resources such as third-party security guards at the Frank A. Cooke Transit Terminal, a customer awareness campaign, and a courtesy stop program.

Previous Reports Submitted

- [PW23025 HSR Public Safety Update, Public Works Committee, April 3, 2023](#)

Consultation

The following external organizations were consulted:

- Toronto Transit Commission (TTC)
- City of Brampton, Brampton Transit

The following internal staff experts were consulted:

- Cyrus Tehrani, Chief Information Officer (Acting), Information Technology/Digital & Innovation, City Manager’s Office
- Heather Anderson, Director, Communications and Engagement, City Manager’s Office.
- Abdul Shaikh, Director, LRT Project Office, Planning and Economic Development Department
- Chris Herstek, Director, Corporate Facilities and Energy Management, Public Works Department
- Martin Dambeau, Manager, Corporate Safety and Security, Public Works Department
- Maryanne Morris, Manager, Policy and Contracts, Procurement, Corporate Services Department
- Andre Zavaglia, Senior Project Manager, Business Support, Transit Division, Public Works Department
- Marsha Collins, Business Relationship Manager, Strategy and Architecture, Information Technology, Corporate Services Department

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Not applicable.

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