

From: Mel Sheehan
Sent: Friday, March 22, 2024 12:52 PM
To: SPPC <sppc@london.ca>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter of Support of the Audit of LTC proposed in the Letter by Deputy Mayor Shawn Lewis & Budget Chair Elizabeth Pelosa

Hello members of the Strategic Priorities & Policies Committee,

My name is Melissa Sheehan. I am an avid supporter of better public transit, as someone who not only has no other transportation option but the transit system in this city, but also someone who has followed very carefully, and at times painstakingly, the way that LTC has managed their funding allotments over the past several years. I have an utmost respect for the role of the London Transit Commission & the management of LTC, however I do not think that respect exempts them or should prevent me from speaking up, to them, & others, about various issues I have with many of their past financial decisions when it comes to their allotments of funding towards improving the service & system city-wide.

The concerns that are shared in the letter that Deputy Mayor Lewis & Budget Chair Pelosa wrote to SPPC are not by any stretch new concerns. These concerns have in fact been a shared source of constant & consistent frustration for many among the ridership for years now. In fact, at every opportunity when we are welcomed to give feedback to LTC about route changes, system improvements, etc, it never ceases to become a constant discouraging sight to see the misallotment of funds for these changes & improvements. There is a large majority of riders out there who have come to the conclusion that the LTC is not actually as customer-centred & ridership-focused as they claim. I will address these concerns by referencing the categories that would be included in the 3rd party audit, and why, ultimately, myself and others do not believe LTC's own audits & assessments can not be trusted anymore.

I firstly want to mention a shared frustration of many riders at LTC's recent campaign where they placed posters across the system threatening us riders that we won't be getting service improvements and would be stuck with the opposite, if we don't push the City for more funding on their behalf. In all honesty, that was disgusting and insulting to riders. It is not OUR responsibility to harass our City Council to do their funding advocacy work. It was disgusting that they one again tried to use us as pawns in their game, and threatened us with no service improvements and additional delays if we didn't advocate on their behalf to the City. What was the point of that, exactly? They got more than enough funding to implement these changes, and also raised fares 15% with the promise of service improvements/changes. That by itself is common practice of LTC over the years, but to be so blatant about it this time around..... is just an indicator of the fact that LTC needs to either be audited, and/or brought in house.

Honestly, what was their end goal? We have already had to deal with no additional or proper service improvements due to their own service & financial decisions over the past decade. Were they hoping they would upset us enough to join their campaign? Well, I can almost guarantee, based on what I've seen and heard from other riders, that it had the ABSOLUTE opposite effect, and instead showed how manipulative & exploitative LTC is of their riders. But that's neither here nor there. Behaviour like that however, needs to be addressed, especially since they clearly spent money from their funding on the campaign. Which again, is entirely ironic & indicative of how they have mismanaged their funding & have been reckless with it at times. The money they used for that campaign would have been better spent improving the service.

That being said, I'm going to move on to the specific parts of the audit that the 3rd party will focus on, and why LTC is more than warranting the audit in each category.

Organizational structure

The entire makeup of the Commission, & management, has been the farthest from the kind of effective, rider-centred structure. Most management members own cars, and have the privilege of having other options than having to rely/depend on the LTC service. The Commission is no different. Out of 7-10 members, only a maximum of 2 members are without the privilege of having other options for transportation. I have the distinct feeling that if management & the commission were made up entirely of riders and those who actually have no other choice but to depend on the service to get around, we might have seen a very different transit system over the past number of years. And, what's worse, is that the Commission members are not provided with a bus pass, so they are having to pay out of pocket to take the bus, which of course isn't much of a problem for the majority of them who have access to other forms of transportation. And it seems like the emphasis of appointing members to the Commission is without an intentional focus of having the majority or entirety of members being riders with no other transportation options. The emphasis seems to be more focussed on those of privilege, who

own businesses, and have very little experience with the transit system. That has, and will continue, to prove to be problematic & entirely opposite of building a more efficient, convenient, and accessible transit system. This needs to be addressed not only through an audit by a 3rd party, but also at Council.

And, the fact that LTC seems to think that they can just audit themselves internally, and have faith in their management and commission, is more indicative of the fact that until they are brought "in-house", there is not going to be the changes or improvements made that need to be. You'll recall that the Commission recently did a self-assessment of themselves and how they felt they had been doing in delivering their service. They gave themselves higher marks than they should have, which shows just how much they are entirely clueless and out of touch with the very system and the problems with it. Their self-assessment triggered so many complaints and letters to Council from riders, even after they tried to justify giving themselves the higher marks. And their reasoning was entirely opposite of reality. Can we really trust the results of their internal audit with that in mind? I don't think so. So I think the structure of the Commission & management is in need of a complete overhaul, which I'm confident would be accomplished by bringing them "in house".

Operational preparedness

Over the past 10 years, LTC has completely torn our transit system to pieces, only to then spend more money fixing their mess at the expense of further improving the system for the sake of improving convenience, accessibility, & frequency for riders had they not taken those routes out in the first place. They have also constantly been opposed to any kind of route interlining that could serve as a proper backbone to build & improve the rest of the system off of. They've implemented selective new routes to the industrial areas, which doesn't do much to address the needs of those who work in those areas.

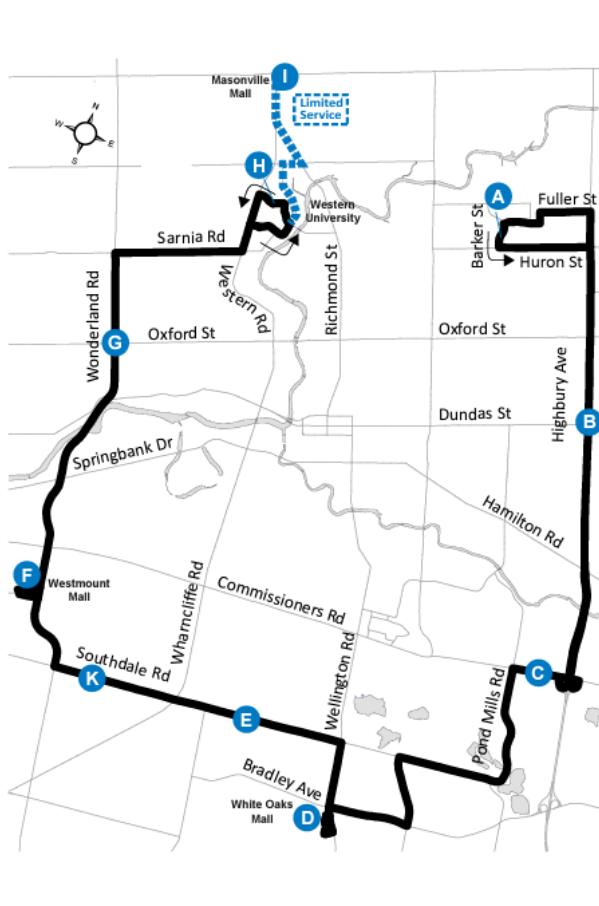
I hope to bring to your attention the basis of the same concerns that Deputy Mayor Lewis & Budget Chair Peloza raise in their letter, only from an informed, long-time rider perspective. I, and I'm willing to bet much of the ridership, share in these concerns and have been the ones raising them to Council for years now, as well as raising them to LTC, only to be dismissed & our concerns ignored & not properly addressed.

I hope to bring to light some of the many decisions, financial & otherwise, that will show that LTC has not been as ridership-minded & system improvement-minded as they have claimed. Us as riders have had to constantly deal with the aftermath of any & all of their financial decisions, as well as their unnecessary, unfair, & unwarranted route & service change decisions.

Current routing of service/Readiness to integrate with Rapid Transit

Back when Shift London and the BRT plan was in its beginning stages, A LOT of people had suggested to both Shift London representatives & LTC that to better support not only the existing transit system but also better support the implementation of a BRT system, perhaps they (LTC) would consider interlining the 10, (known at the time by the 10 & 14 routes) so that both directions would service Masonville Mall, which would mean the system would have a ring route to build off of.

For context, if you look at the current/long-existing 10 route, it looks from the map like a giant Pacman, with a gap in it preventing it from servicing the entire city. Going northbound it turns off of Highbury at Fuller, and then services the Briarhill area before ending up back on Highbury at Huron & Highbury going Southbound.



Now, you see how much of the city this ONE route services right? That's 3/4 of the city EASILY. It services both Fanshawe & Western, countless grocery stores, most malls/shopping centres, & a majority of the elementary & secondary schools, as well as hospitals & other essential services.

And it would certainly have benefitted the system & the implementation of BRT if they were to extend the 10 route on the Highbury end up to Fanshawe Park Road, and then have it travel along Fanshawe Park Road to Masonville, where it would turn into the SB 10 and continue along the Western/Natural Science portion. That would have created a full ring route, and would have been a good new starting point for building, improving & adding greater service across the system. And would have been a great base line to implement BRT into. And it probably would have lessened the overall price tag of BRT in even a minimal way.

Now, at the time that Shift London was starting up, there was a large collective of riders who had consistently asked for the price tag that would have allowed for that interline to happen at Masonville. Even before BRT, that collective had asked LTC to extend it. Back then, LTC said it would be too expensive, at a grand total of approximately 2 million dollars. Which is interesting when you consider the financial decisions & route implementations that have followed to try to add service to that very area not serviced by the 10, which has come at a much greater cost than the 2 million dollars that extending the 10 would have back then. Since then, we've had the 40 come and go, which was a new route implemented after the 13A was eliminated in the north end past Masonville, and have had the 34, the 19 (formerly the 38/39) modified to service the area, and the addition of the 25, which services the area between Fanshawe & Masonville. All of that has more than exceeded the 2 million dollars it would have cost for the 10/14 to have been extended up to Masonville in the northeast end.

And to add "insult to injury", the 25, which only services 1 little portion of the city, has had improvements to its frequency, whereas the 10, which again, services 3/4 of the city, has had to be left with no improved frequency in the past few years. This is just one of the things that LTC has decided to do that has boggled the minds, and frustrated to no end, many of their ridership.

And then, there's their insistence on having Sunday/Holiday schedules instead of having the same service levels 7 days a week. And the Sunday/Holiday service levels are still Christmas Day level since during COVID. People still need to get around to industrial areas, and other areas that are only serviced during peak periods or only during the week, on Sundays & holidays. And people who live in those areas deserve better than minimal service or to only have service during the week.

Their decisions to offer minimal/bottom of the barrel service levels to industrial areas, including the airport, or in the surrounding residential areas where people live, and not having service at

all on Sundays/Holidays, has been a major factor in the lacklustre system overall being accessible, dependable, or efficient for anyone. And with the peak period service levels being the only option LTC will offer for these industrial areas, it seems like the LTC is literally setting these routes up to fail & lack ridership, so they can eliminate/scrap them later. I've seen this happen on mainline routes previously, so this isn't a new concern either. Having these limited time routes impacts the amount of ridership that these routes could be seeing if they were to align their schedules with mainline routes, which impacts their KPI I'm sure. They keep creating routes to serve these areas, but never give them the frequency levels of mainlines. There's no areas of our city that should have less than the same frequency levels as mainlines. And this has been a concern for decades.

Financial structure of bus passes and contracts

Now, there's a whole other issue when it comes to their decisions on fares, passes, etc. We as riders, many of whom are already struggling with the rising cost of living and such, and many of whom are on some form of social or other assistance, have been constantly subjected to paying more than our fair share of the increases LTC puts forward every few years. I saw first-hand this past year that while post-secondary institutions in our City represent a majority of not only revenue but ridership amounts for LTC, they don't dare to play hardball in order to force these institutions to pay the share of the increase that a majority ridership & revenue source should be. Both USC & FSU representatives, at the last meeting where their portion of the increase of fares recently would be discussed, decried paying more than 6% of an increase in their fare program, citing that "their students didn't see a value in the service and so they feel they shouldn't have to pay more than that 6%". This was met with softball, if any, pushback from London Transit Commission members. There was a mention of sending it to a referendum, but nothing materialized.

That's absolutely disgusting. The LTC would rather not rattle feathers or inconvenience their golden goose (in terms of the main contributor to their revenue and ridership) and pass on the additional increase that they should have had to pay onto the rest of the ridership, who don't contribute revenue or ridership anywhere near the level of that of the post-secondary institutions. We need a transit authority/commission that is not afraid to play hardball & actually has a backbone that will actually force their hand, rather than passing the additional costs & percentage of the increase onto the rest of the ridership.

That goes without saying that over the past 4 years, the post-secondary institutions have only paid a 12 percent increase in their fare program, which self-subsidizes & therefore doesn't require every student to use the service in order to be cost-effective for them, whereas the rest of the ridership has seen an increase over that same period of 40 plus percent. Keep in mind that the current fares & passes are at an amount that many riders are having to sacrifice groceries & basic needs to be able to afford just for the fact that they have no choice but to depend on the transit system to get those basic needs & get by day to day.

Also, how is it that we are the only municipality of our size that doesn't have day passes available for people who are visiting here, or maybe for those who only need to run errands once or twice a week/month? That's a possible source of revenue that LTC has never seemingly been interested in doing. Many who can't afford the CitiPass would certainly use and benefit from a day pass. And of course, people visiting over a weekend or on a day trip would certainly benefit from it. The idea has been brought up to them previously, but it's never been taken on. And from a tourism perspective, it would make our transit system much more attractive to visitors who are here for conferences, competitions, conventions, etc. That is one thing that I think should definitely be explored as not only a revenue source, but also a tool to entice tourists & visitors.

And then, there's the fact that the most recent increase also saw an increase to the Income Related Bus Pass Program. Keep in mind that recent changes to the Ontario Works program have left many having to pay for their IRBP with their basic needs after the Ford government clawed back employment support benefits to those on social assistance. And sure, while 72 dollars may not seem like it's much to anyone compared to the 112 dollars it costs for a CitiPass, it's still disgusting that these people are among the ridership that isn't the main contributor to revenue or ridership, but is having to pay more than their fair share in order to compensate for post-secondary institutions not feeling like they should have to pay for what their ridership/revenue contributions more than warrant.

And then, there's the fact that there's no other way to have kept the IRBP program costs from increasing. LTC passed the buck of responsibility onto the City, and the City did the same. There should be something that can be done to not have that program have to suffer & be impacted by the 15% increase that happened. We need to address that program for sure, to see what can be done to lessen the financial impact to those on the IRBP program.

One more point of contention for many riders is the LTC's constant complaining of their revenue shortfalls. A lot of riders have seen how they themselves contribute to those shortfalls. Case in point is the fact that they instruct their drivers to allow people who don't have the proper fare to ride for free. And this isn't just isolated incidents. This is a regular occurrence, and has been for years. And while we understand that they don't wish to have their drivers forcing people to pay or follow the common sense rules of the system, given the concerning number of incidents here & elsewhere that have resulted from drivers trying to do so, but at the same time, for all of the complaining that they do about not having revenue, they don't seem too interested in implementing measures in order to enforce their fare policy properly.

One way they could accomplish that is to have drivers using the keypad on the fare box. As someone who has had many conversations with drivers about what the keypad on the fare box is, and have seen them being used in other cities, I have known that the keypad has corresponding numbers to the different fares. I know, last time I checked, that the "3" on the keypad is the button corresponding to "no fare/insufficient fare". And while many drivers/operators who have been around for a while are always using the keypad, I don't see many of the newer drivers doing this, which is allowing for adequate information not being readily submitted or available when their annual budget comes around. Another way they could accomplish this is to have FOBs available, similar to the kid's FOBs. Though I have a feeling they are reluctant to do that because they probably think that people would flock to get one instead of paying for the passes, tickets, etc.

A lot of riders find it absolutely unfair that those who are more honest are the ones that are having to pay these increased fares & passes, when there are people who are under no obligation to do the same. This is not right or fair, and is one of the many things that are contributing to their revenues being low, and as such, justification they use to raise fares, passes, and ticket prices.

This complaint of them having lost revenue over the past number of years can also be traced back to LTC deciding, on their own, to stop collecting fares during the pandemic. And they did so with full acknowledgement of the fact that it would absolutely send them into financial peril. And I believe, if I'm not mistaken, that London was one of the last cities to reimplement fares. They should have kept collecting fares during COVID, and willingly decided not to, knowing full well the long-standing impacts to their revenue that decision would have.

Other Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

I have really struggled, as have other people, with understanding how LTC management & the commission determine the criteria for KPI's. For example, frequency decisions is really one that is consistently problematic over the past decade plus. I have tried to ask how exactly they determine frequency, and it doesn't seem like their criteria for determining frequency lines up with the actual needs of the transit system. For example, the 10. It services probably a larger portion of the city, even in a circle around the entire city, than most other routes do. And yet, constantly over the past number of years, the 10 has gone from having decent or passable frequency to absolute bullocks frequency. And meanwhile, routes like the 25, 102, 104, 106, etc. see frequency improvements that they don't really need, considering, let's be honest, those 3 routes only exist because they couldn't be bothered to increase frequency to the 2, 4, and 6 respectively. And it's frustrating that other routes that see greater ridership are seeing their frequency not improved, and instead slashed, or given a minimal joke of an increase. I think if an audit is done, it should definitely look at some of their criteria for deciding on service levels.

I'd also like it more well known about the criteria used to determine their KPI's, as they don't seem to make that information public for riders to be better informed.

I am hopeful that the things I have shared here will perhaps entice the committee to vote in favour of the motion brought forward by Deputy Mayor Lewis & Councillor Pelosa.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I give my permission for this to appear on the public agenda.

Sincerely,

Melissa Sheehan