

9. Providing for children and youth as transit users

Guideline 12. Ensure that every part of a transit system is safe and welcoming to young people, and affordable.

Youth can be heavy users of transit, and in some communities comprise a significant share of transit users. However, they sometimes may not be as welcome as passengers as adults for fear they will be rowdy, vandalize transit property or do something unsafe.

Transit managers could help ensure that children and youth are welcome on their systems by appropriate messaging in schools, on the systems themselves and in other ways. Edmonton's transit system is known for recognizing the importance of young people as current and future customers and goes out of its way to attract them, especially for the journey to and from school. Box 6 shows the relevant part of the City's Web site.

Box 6. Edmonton Transit System (ETS) strongly encourages student use of transit⁹⁰

School Service



ETS strives to provide safe, reliable transit service to students.

We offer reduced student fares, travel training, and community outreach programs as part of our superior service to student travelers.

ETS School Service information that outlines which routes service any given school are available through [BusLink](#), [ETS Customer Services](#), and the [School Services](#) tool.

Subsidized ETS student monthly passes are available to elementary, junior and senior high school students only through the school they attend.

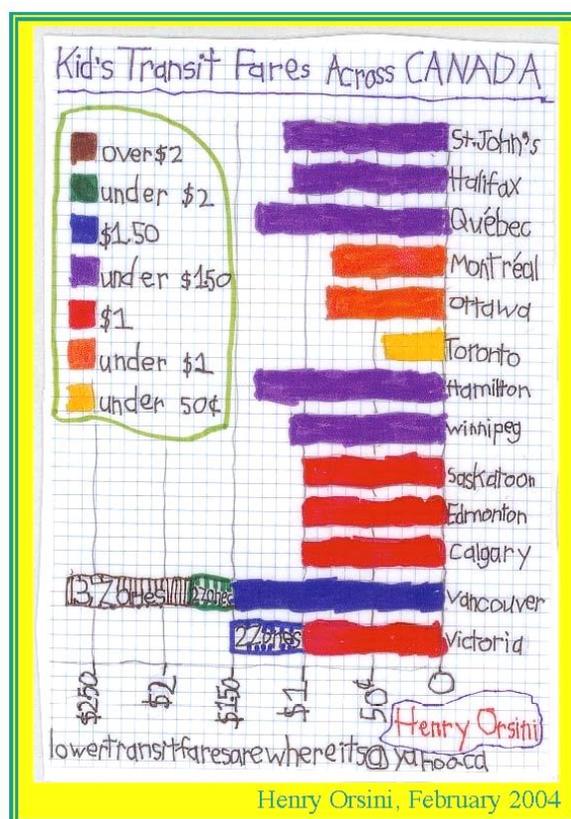
Young people in Edmonton want their transit system to be even more friendly: “Investing in future users is certainly very important. How about finding new and innovative ways to engage with children of different ages? For instance, transit agency involvement in school events: why not offer ‘premier’ bus service to high school graduation ceremonies? At younger ages, bus operators could give out candy on Halloween, etc. The goal should be

to give kids great memories on transit and give them confidence to travel independently using it!”⁹¹

For younger teenagers, and especially for even younger children who use transit without an adult, safety in relation to strangers is an important feature. Consideration of children’s needs when managing such aspects of transit systems would lead to provision of higher levels of supervision in places where children might be vulnerable. Moreover, a transit system that is friendlier to children will also be friendlier to other vulnerable groups. Children of seven or eight years and older are capable of using transit systems alone, and do so in many large Asian cities including Hong Kong and Tokyo. This used to happen in North American cities a few decades ago but now, even though cities may be objectively safer,⁹² allowing a child to use transit can be frowned on. A writer resident in Manhattan who allowed her nine-year-old son to use the subway was called “America’s worst mom.”⁹³ In many places, not allowing transit use can represent lost opportunities for children’s independent mobility.

Useful objectives for the planning of a transit system could be that eight- or nine-year-old children are confident about using it without supervision, and that the children’s parents are comfortable about such use.

Children’s fares vary greatly even between transit systems serving adjacent areas. For example, in early 2010 in one part of the Toronto region the children’s cash fare is 75 cents. In the neighbouring area the children’s cash fare is \$3.25 (\$4.25 for longer trips), the same as the adult fare.⁹⁵ A young Vancouver resident’s research in 2004 on this matter is shown in Figure 5.



Low fares for children can be an investment in future regular riders. They can also be of special benefit to families with low incomes.

One way of encouraging the transit habit at an impressionable age could be to provide all high-school students with a no-cost (to them) transit pass. A model could be the kind of transit pass, known as a U-pass, available without additional charge to students of some universities in Canada.⁹⁶

Municipalities and transit systems might want to consider these suggestions carefully and, if they are adopted, engage in appropriate educational campaigns, particularly in connection with providing attractive fares for young people. The result could be a generation more inclined to use transit, and thus an investment in the future.⁹⁷

Guideline 13. Avoid transfers by routing vehicles where children and youth want to and need to go; make transfers easy where necessary.

A challenging feature of transit systems, especially for younger children, is the frequent requirement to transfer between routes and even between modes. Transfers can be avoided by more appropriate routing of vehicles.

Where transfers are nevertheless required, directions could be positioned to serve the needs of younger children who might need them as well as youth and adults.

As in other respects, designing this aspect of transit systems with children and youth in mind can result in systems that are attractive to a wide range of users.

Guideline 14. Examine every aspect of a transit system from the perspective of a parent with a child in a stroller, and make adjustments to meet such a traveller's needs.

Among the most challenged users of transit systems are passengers with young children in strollers. These users have particular difficulties when there are stairs or steps and when vehicles are overcrowded.



For stairs and steps the remedies are to change the infrastructure or the vehicles. Elevators can be sometimes be added; low-floor vehicles can be used (see Figure 6). A lower-cost option can be to encourage a culture of watching out for persons travelling with young children. Such a

Figure 6. More than half of Winnipeg Transit's 535 buses are low-floor, made by New Flyer Industries, based in Winnipeg.⁹⁸

culture can be of value in periods of overcrowding, when passengers with young children could be given more space, and help getting on and off transit vehicles.

A transit system that is congenial to an adult pushing a child in a stroller, and to the child, will likely be congenial to a wide range of users, including older people who are frail and young people and adults who live with disabilities.