

April 3, 1985

Mr. Julian Porter, Chairman Toronto Transit  
Commission 1900 Yonge Street Toronto, Ontario  
M4S 1Z2

Re: Queen Streetcar Operations Study - TTC Commission Meeting April 9, 1985

Dear Mr. Porter:

I would like to thank the TTC for commissioning the Queen Street Study. It provides a wealth of information, much of which confirms the earlier findings of the Streetcars for Toronto survey, in which I participated, as well as comments and criticisms from residents of Ward 9.

For instance, I am gratified that the Joint Program report finally acknowledges the scale at which short-turns are perpetrated, with an average of 63 per weekday, and as high as 95 on Friday.

The report also acknowledges a fact that I consider very important - Queen Street riders are very heavy users of the system. 70% use the streetcar 10 or more times a week. These riders are extremely familiar with service levels, are immediately aware of changes in service levels, and really, probably know as much about the Queen Streetcar line as your inspectors do. They deserve to be paid attention to.

I hope the report will also finally lay to rest some hoary old chestnuts that your staff pull out, everytime the service is criticized.

For instance, I hope I will never be told again, as I have been for years, that the primary causes of service delay are traffic accidents, rush hour conditions, or bad weather.

The report makes it clear that loading and unloading passengers is the largest cause of "delay", and really ought not to be referred to as delay. I note the schedule has been slightly adjusted to take this into consideration. Installing a realistic schedule was the prime recommendation of Streetcars for Toronto.

The report also makes it clear that there is no seasonal pattern to the number of short-turns, i.e. poor traffic conditions in winter do not increase the number, which average almost 2000 per month.

Nor do rush hour traffic conditions apparently increase the number of short-turns. The daily average is 63 short-turns, with a high of 95 on Friday. Saturdays, when there is no rush hour still get 65 short-turns - but there are 15% fewer scheduled trips than on weekdays so there are proportionally more short-turns on Saturday than on most weekdays!!!!

Who is inconvenienced by all this short-turning? The Joint Report concludes that procedures are based on sound trade-offs between benefits and disbenefits to all passengers. The figures presented don't really bear this out. They estimate that approximately 500 persons daily are, as they say, "unexpectedly off-loaded" from short-turned cars, with 300 of those in the p.m. peak period. In addition there are 2,700 riders at the end sections of the line who have to wait longer. The report claims the extra waiting time is "extremely small", and that cars which are short-turned have very low loads. So there are at least 3200 riders daily inconvenienced by short-turning.

The report claims that the data implies that 5,000 riders benefit from shorter waiting time because of short-turning practices.

This is expressed in different ways in different parts of the report. For instance, during the week previous to the survey, 32% of the passengers experienced at least one short-turn.

Of course, 100% of these inconvenienced passengers live close to the end of the line. The report admits that passengers at the end of the line experience longer waiting times. So

it is misleading to tell a Ward 9 resident that the average headway is around two and a half minutes. In any case, when the schedule is irregular, terms like "average" load, and "average" headway, don't mean much.

I would still maintain that you don't really know how many people are inconvenienced, and I believe the Joint Report supports this claim. Inspectors order short-turns to regulate spacing between streetcars - to fill gaps. Inspectors are supposed to only short-turn cars with a load of 15 persons or less, and when there is another streetcar "in sight". But the report admits that "in practice, the number of person on board the car at the short-turn location is unknown, since the decision to execute a short-turn is made at an upstream location." The actual state of the gap between streetcars at the short-turn location is also unknown. This condition remains and is a major flaw in the proposed solutions. For those persons experiencing short-turning, only 28% estimated their wait for the next car of less than two minutes, while 30% stated they waited longer than five minutes.

The report give faint praise to these procedures, stating they are generally well executed "particularly in view of the small number of inspectors assigned to a route of this length."

The clear implication to me is that there ought to be more inspectors on the route, with the extra inspectors stationed near where the short-turn occurs so they could manage the cars more effectively, and space them properly. I believe that one or two inspectors in the field will do more good, and be more modest in cost, than the high-tech communications system your staff is counting so heavily on.

The report clearly understands your passengers' major frustration - the simple desire to know what's going on. Everyone understands the system has to be adjusted to meet changing conditions, but it is being dumped here and there like airline baggage that annoys people. But I do advise you not to publish a pamphlet on how wonderful short-turning is. The most convenient time for passengers to study such a document will no doubt be at the corner of Coxwell and Queen, while waiting for the next streetcar, having been unexpectedly off-loaded.

I am also glad to note that while your staff disparages the recommendation by Streetcars for Toronto that short-turns be scheduled because of passenger inconvenience (!?!), the Joint Report recommends that "during peak periods, one-third of the 501 vehicles should be scheduled to run on an "internal" branch between Sunnyside and Woodbine loops as a means of regulating service while minimizing the inconvenience of unscheduled short-turning." I believe this should be instituted as soon as possible.

Finally, your staff see the introduction of the larger articulated streetcars (ALRV's), controlled by its Communications and Information System (CIS) as the ultimate solution. But not for your faithful riders in Ward 9. For us it means reduced service, with larger headways, larger passenger loads, longer waits. This is no improvement.

I believe the Joint Program study of the Queen line has been an important and valuable initiative which, together with the work of Streetcars for Toronto, has resulted in improvements. However, the Queen Streetcar service got this attention, not because it's the worst line, but because it's high profile. According to the Streetcars for Toronto survey, almost one out of two eastbound Carlton cars was short-turned - double the ratio of that on Queen Street. I trust that your success in introducing improvements on Queen Street will encourage you to give similar scrutiny to the other major east-west routes.

In conclusion, I note that the advertising budget for the TTC is over one million dollars for 1985. The best advertising is a good word of mouth. At present, a significant proportion of your Queen Street riders one out of four - have expressed discontent. If you put this money into service improvements, your grateful riders would gladly sing your praises all day long, and I would happily lead the chorus!

Yours truly,  
Dorothy Thomas Alderman - Ward 9