



AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION LOCAL 113

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December 4, 2018

Ontario Premier, Doug Ford
Office of the Premier
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford,

On January 1, 2019, every Toronto Metropass user will be required to use the Presto Card fare system. Unfortunately, Presto is not ready.

It is critical that Metrolinx, the TTC, and the Ontario Government take immediate and urgent action to fix the Presto fare card systems' failures to ensure a smooth transition of Metropass users to the Presto fare card system.

ATU Local 113 is in a unique position to identify problems with Presto and the consequent loss in fare revenue because our 11,500 members operate, schedule and maintain all of the different modes of transit that make up the TTC.

This letter identifies the most urgent of the many problems our members have identified with the Presto fare card system. In addition, we have provided solutions to each of these pressing problems.

Problems with Presto

- **Bus and streetcar drivers regularly report Presto failures**

Presto regularly fails at all times of the day sometimes for extended periods of time.

A TTC operator of ten years writes that, "it regularly takes from five to 60 minutes for a Presto reader to turn on and go live after I turn on the bus."

A driver out of Malvern garage says Presto failures are a daily occurrence. He writes, "Ninety-nine percent of the time, one of the two Presto readers shuts down during a shift. I can have a bus for 4 hours in the morning, the front machine will be working fine, and then it will either freeze (but still say "ready") or it will reboot itself...and sometimes it can take upwards of 20 minutes to reload. If the bus is jammed, I'm not asking my passengers to squeeze through everyone to 'try' the back machine."

A Birchmount driver confirms this picture. "In our garage, 4 to 5 buses a night come in for Presto problems. The company has a printout of which bus does not have a Presto reader working properly in it. If they do not get the bus repaired, it goes out on the road again with an inoperative Presto reader. Mine malfunctioned this morning. Last week on 5 of 6 of my buses, the front Presto did not function."

A street car driver on Queen Street reports a similar experience. "There are three Presto readers on my car. They can all be working fine, then part-way through my run passengers will complain that the middle one has packed up. Later, it will reboot and the front one will freeze. I'd estimate that anywhere between 10-20% of fares are not being paid on any given shift."

A night bus driver reported that every night Presto readers go out for hours. He writes "Every night at exactly 3:09am every single Presto reader across the city goes red "not in service". We figure this is the time Presto updates their database or something along those lines, but when the entire fleet goes down nightly and stays down for 15 minutes to an hour (and a lot never turn back on until they get back to garage at 6am) the revenue loss is astronomical!"

- **Collectors report regular and systemic failures with Presto at train stations**

A collector at Wilson Station reported having to spend the day letting people through the gates because their Presto card failed. Pointing to a bank of Presto vending machines across the barrier, he said "that at least one of them was out of order every day and it took Presto staff hours or days to fix them." He said, "One machine was not taking bills correctly. The Presto technicians went off to get a part and didn't leave a warning on the machine. Within half an hour someone lost a \$50 bill in the machine. He'll get his money back, but meanwhile, he had no funds to buy a ticket."

A collector at Sheppard West reported: "I very rarely recall a shift in the past year where all Presto gates have been fully functional for my entire shift. This is extremely frustrating for the customer. Customers get upset because they have gone through the expense of paying \$6.00 for a card that is not reliable. Customers have been injured by gates. The fare vending machines are always broken. They eat customers funds without adding money to the card, they will not accept cash, they are out of cards etc." He said the TTC has to wait days for the company responsible for Presto to service them.

- **Lengthy delays in Presto repairs**

Currently, if a Presto reader goes down, TTC staff are not allowed to fix it, even if they are directly on site. This significantly delays repairs, and leads to a significant loss in fare revenue.

For example, a vehicle repairperson working in streetcar maintenance reports that when a Presto reader fails, the streetcar is taken out of service until Presto sends a technician to correct the error. The wait is unpredictable, ranging from hours to days, and in some cases weeks. The car will stay out of operation during that time, reducing service and losing revenue. "I could fix the reader in 15 minutes", he says, "but I'm not allowed to touch it."

Solutions

- **ATU Local 113 members should repair Presto card readers**

The TTC has a large corps of highly trained, qualified and conscientious staff capable of keeping the fare system running efficiently. There are maintenance staff at Greenwood and St. Clair stations directly on the subway line. Prior to fare collection being taken over by Presto, these workers would have been dispatched immediately to deal with fare machine or fare gate problems or to fix the machines at bus and streetcar garages. The provincial government should restore maintenance and repair of Presto machines to the TTC, allowing ATU Local 113 members to do this work.

- **End the privatization and contracting out of the TTC**

Instead of one seamless workforce doing whatever is needed to keep the system running, the TTC and its workforce are at the mercy of private companies whose actions are neither accountable or transparent. For the privilege of maintaining Toronto's fare system, Presto is paid 5.25% of every fare, revenue that is not available to fund TTC operations or maintenance.

The Provincial Government, the TTC, and Metrolinx should take steps to ensure public transit remains in public hands, including the TTC subway system.

Conclusion

The information in this letter provides further evidence to the growing concern that Presto needs immediate and significant improvements.

A private memo from TTC's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Kirsten Watson, to the TTC Board states that "the machines are performing at levels that are not sustainable over the long term given the impact on customers, revenue and reputation."

Failure to collect fares makes it appear that ridership is down when in fact there is severe overcrowding on the system.

The TTC calculates it is hemorrhaging over \$4 million in fare revenue a year due to failures with Presto readers. The cost of implementing Presto is now projected to be \$1.2 billion, over double the original estimate. I am confident that you can agree that urgent action is required to address the financial losses that these two figures represent to the TTC.

We look forward to your response,

Sincerely,



Frank Grimaldi
President/Business Agent

FG:rc

cc: TTC Chief Executive Officer, Rick Leary
Metrolinx Chief Executive Officer, Phil Verster
Mayor, City of Toronto, John Tory