

## Should rush hour commuters pay more to take the TTC?

Once TTC says 'Presto,' charging riders less at off-peak times could reduce congestion, say some observers.

By: Karissa Donkin News reporter, Wed Feb 06 2013

When Jay Russell takes the southbound train at Bloor-Yonge station on a weekday morning, he feels like he's trying to navigate through a "swarm of locusts."

"As soon as the doors open, they all just plow in, they don't give a crap about anybody else. They'll push you out of the way just to get in," Russell said.

On Tuesday just after 9 a.m., Russell — a courier who uses the TTC to make deliveries — waits for a second train instead of trying to squeeze into the first, which is packed almost to the doors. Half an hour ago, at the peak of the morning commute, he might have had to wait for two trains to pass before he could board.

The TTC had a record number of riders in 2012 and expects that number to rise again this year.

With more people piling on buses, streetcars and subways, some observers believe charging a higher fare at busy hours could encourage people to avoid travel when there's no room for them.

A [report](#) by the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** that looks at ways to pay for public transit and roads in the GTA says flat fares encourage overinvesting in "public transit infrastructure."

"You're going to have those capacity problems and they will try to overbuild the infrastructure to take in that peak capacity," **RCCAO spokesman Andy Manahan** said.

The TTC is looking "at all fare policy options" while implementing the Presto fare card system, TTC spokesman Brad Ross said.

Presto allows riders to pay their fare by tapping a pre-loaded card at an electronic reader. It's expected to be in use at all TTC stations and in its vehicles by 2016 at the latest.

"Presto allows us to review all of these fare policies, because the technology then gives us greater flexibility to do things differently," Ross said.

Many other public transit systems around the world have separate prices at peak and off-peak times on some routes — including London's Tube and New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Ottawa's system experimented with a similar structure about 20 years ago and was successful in spreading out peak travel times, said Michael Roschlau, president and CEO of the Canadian Urban Transit Association.

"That kind of fare structure would generate an incentive for some people to shift their travel patterns if they can do so," Roschlau said. Generally, many people in large cities take transit by choice and have a vehicle they could use if they want, he said.

Though it may be an incentive to change behaviour, transit advocate Steve Munro thinks that in practice, the shift would be minimal. Most people that can travel outside rush hours already do, he said. There's also a problem with how the system covers the cost of cheaper fares.

"It's tinkering around the edges and not addressing the basic issue that there needs to be more transit out there. The basic point is, we're not running enough service in some places. We should have been building another line into downtown long, long ago," he said.

Russell used to avoid Bloor-Yonge station at all costs, opting to transfer at St. George station when he needed to move between subway lines.

But he finds that station is just as congested now.