

Toronto-wide poll rejects TTC’s ‘One Person Train Operation’ plan to eliminate Subway Guards before year-end. Safety and need for public input are major concerns.

TORONTO, ONTARIO – (March 15, 2021) – Without consulting its riders, the TTC is planning to eliminate a key position that has helped make Toronto’s subway system one of the safest in the world. Public reaction to the One Person Train Operation (OPTO) scheme is negative, according to a [recent poll](#) by Toronto-based Corbett Communications.

The February poll found that 71% of Toronto respondents disapprove of the TTC plan and two out of three (65%) would not feel safe on a train with only one crew member. The poll, commissioned by Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 113, which represents nearly 12,000 TTC workers, also found that 84% of respondents feel the TTC should hold public consultations about the Guard elimination plan *before* taking any steps to implement it.

In response to the strong current of opinion against OPTO, ATU Local 113 is launching a public campaign to inform the public of the TTC’s reckless plan.

A website, OnGuardForYou.ca, is an information centre on the OPTO issue where visitors can enter a contest to win the value of a Monthly Pass (\$156.00) by participating in a three-question survey about OPTO.

The two-crew system has been in place, with few exceptions since the subway first opened in 1954. The Operator (often called the “Driver,”) drives the train from the front car, focusing on the track ahead. The Guard is responsible for passenger safety – from ensuring no one is caught in the closing doors of train cars to responding to medical emergencies, assaults, harassments, suicide attempts, lost children and power outages. Guards also organize and supervise the emergency evacuation of passengers from trains stranded in tunnels, often in close cooperation with the Driver.

The union representing TTC Subway Guards says the OPTO idea is dangerous and should be subject to further study and public consultation. Although TTC management has said no jobs would be lost because of OPTO, “That misses the point entirely, which is public safety,” says Carlos Santos, President of ATU Local 113.

The TTC admits it is planning to remove all Guards from subway trains on the Yonge-University-Spadina line by the end of this year (and later on the Bloor-Danforth line) but insists this will not jeopardize public safety.

There’s already some disturbing evidence that this claim lacks evidence. On the less-travelled Sheppard subway line, where the TTC has experimented with operating trains without Guards since 2016, there’s been a startling 50% increase in dangerous red light violations. Transit experts testifying at a long-running TTC arbitration on whether the OPTO system is safe, have pointed to “inattentive blindness” as the problem, an issue the airline industry and traffic planners have long grappled with.

The TTC’s motivation appears to be cost-cutting. It’s hard to see any savings, however, since the TTC plans to make up for the missing Guards by hiring more higher-paid Station Managers. This

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patchwork safety plan, however, makes little sense, if any. Station Managers, who will be responsible for multiple stations, won't be on the scene at track level in an emergency. They may not even be nearby.

Having a Station Manager somewhere in the area is very different than having a Guard right on the train. Moreover, the very presence of the uniformed Guard acts as a deterrent to disruptive passengers - a deterrent particularly important during a pandemic when social distancing is essential.

Rather than eliminating the Guards, the TTC should be making the public more aware of them and the vital role they have long played in assuring passenger safety and comfort.

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