

**For Immediate Release****TTC Suspends Video Surveillance Program at Wheel-Trans****Toronto – July 10th, 2013**

Following an investigation by the City of Toronto Ombudsman, the TTC has suspended the use of video surveillance to assess the eligibility of Wheel-Trans riders.

“The ‘Questionable Rider’ program at Wheel-Trans lacked any elements of due process or fairness,” says Ombudsman Fiona Crean. “Riders whose eligibility was being questioned were never told about the video surveillance that was being used against them.”

The findings are part of an investigation report released today, “Wheel-Trans is Watching – An Investigation into the Toronto Transit Commission’s Use of Video Surveillance on Wheel-Trans Vehicles.”

The TTC installed video surveillance cameras in all its vehicles between 2006 and 2008. At the time, the Transit Commission said the cameras were for crime deterrence and the safety and security of passengers and staff, and agreed to consult with the public before expanding their use.

But Crean says “they never consulted the public when they started using video surveillance in 2010 to check on the eligibility of Wheel-Trans passengers. And the warning notice on Wheel-Trans vehicles is so small that most people wouldn’t notice it.”

Wheel-Trans is a door-to-door transit service provided by the TTC for residents with limited mobility. When there is a complaint that a rider may not be physically challenged, the TTC begins a “Questionable Rider” investigation.

- Riders being reassessed are never told the TTC has video of them boarding a Wheel-Trans vehicle, so they cannot prepare an adequate response.
- The independent panel that handles the reassessment does not use any scoring guidelines when viewing the video.
- Riders are given no information about the reassessment process or its criteria, beyond the time and place of the interview.

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- People who lose their eligibility are usually sent vague letters that do not explain how the decision was reached, or the fact that video surveillance was employed.
- Neither the appeal process nor the application is posted on the TTC website.

“The way the ‘Questionable Rider’ program is operated is just plain unfair,” says Crean.

Mr. T, a 66-year old man with diabetes, neuropathy and an amputated leg, says the video surveillance “rubs me the wrong way. When you see someone on camera for such a short time, it might not appear that he is having difficulty, when really the person is. A camera gives you a superficial impression.”

The TTC has agreed to implement all 11 of the Ombudsman’s recommendations concerning public consultation, notification and its video recording policy within the suggested timeframes.

Crean says she is pleased the TTC has agreed to suspend the reassessment process until appropriate safeguards are put in place to treat riders fairly.

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*Toronto’s Ombudsman is an impartial and independent officer of City Council, providing an appeal of last resort for people who feel they have been adversely affected by a decision, act or omission of City Administration. The Ombudsman also undertakes investigations into systemic problems that cause equitable, substantial and procedural unfairness in City administration.*