



ON THE FRONT LINE: KEEPING TRANSIT SAFE

In 2025, the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) produced *On the Front Line: Keeping Transit Safe*, the first national documentary focused on transit safety from the perspective of front-line workers. Filmed on location across five major Canadian cities (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto and Montreal) the documentary captures the lived experiences of those working every day to keep transit safe: outreach workers, special constables, peace officers and police partners.

This work builds on the foundation of *Prioritizing Safety on Public Transit*, a national set of 27 recommendations developed in 2023 by CUTA's Transit Safety Task Force. This documentary was produced with support from TransLink, Calgary Transit, Edmonton Transit Service, Toronto Transit Commission, Société de transport de Montréal along with ATU Canada, outreach and policing partners.

The documentary brings these recommendations to life. It showcases how agencies are responding to growing safety challenges and highlights the urgent need for broader, coordinated government action.

WHY WE DID IT

We must face a simple truth: if people don't feel safe on transit, they won't take it. As societal challenges, like homelessness, mental health crises, and substance use, become more visible in transit systems, agencies are doing their best to respond. But they can't do it alone.

CUTA and its transit agency partners developed this documentary to:

- Provide an authentic, unfiltered view of what's happening on the ground.
- Share the innovative approaches transit agencies are using to keep people safe.
- Elevate public understanding of the systemic issues driving these challenges.
- Make the case for urgent and sustained government support.

The national transit safety recommendations—featured throughout the documentary—focus on four pillars:

1. Customer and Staff Safety

Supporting safe environments through updated safety plans, training, resources, and communications.

2. Mental Health Support

Partnering with mental health professionals to develop compassionate, care-oriented responses for those in crisis.

3. Housing and Homelessness

Recognizing the impact of the housing crisis and connecting unhoused individuals sheltering on transit to the help they need.

4. Substance Use in Transit Facilities

Responding to the growing presence of substance use through harm reduction strategies and public health coordination.

WHAT SUPPORT ARE WE ASKING FROM GOVERNMENT?

Transit agencies are stepping up, but they are being asked to take on roles traditionally filled by the health, housing, and social services sectors. *On the Front Line* is also an advocacy tool, meant to support CUTA's call for the following from all levels of government:

- **Federal and Provincial Transit Safety Funding**

Funding programs (capital and operating) that support:

- o Safety-related station retrofits and infrastructure upgrades
- o Training and capacity building for front-line and outreach staff
- o Funding for outreach and enforcement staff in the transit environment

- **Strengthening Legal Protections Under the Criminal Code**

CUTA is calling for federal leadership to address violence and harassment through legal reform by amending subsection 269.01 of the Criminal Code to strengthen penalties for assaults on transit workers.

- o Current protections under the Criminal Code apply only to bus and transit vehicle operators.
- o In 2024, Bill C-395 was introduced to extend these protections to all transit workers – including fare inspectors, maintenance staff, and station personnel – and to strengthen penalties for assaults. The bill lapsed with the election.
- o CUTA urges the Government of Canada to reintroduce similar legislation.

This reform would send a strong signal that transit worker safety is a national priority and provide meaningful protection for those on the front lines of Canada's transit systems.

- **Provincial Deployment of Mental Health Workers**

Provincial support for deploying trained mental health professionals to assist with de-escalation and crisis response on transit.

- **Targeted investments from the Federal Government and Provinces in solutions to address the root causes of societal challenges impacting transit.**

This includes increasing access to shelter and supportive housing, expanding mental health care services, and strengthening public health responses to substance use—so that transit systems are no longer left to manage these complex issues on their own.

TRANSIT SAFETY ISN'T JUST ABOUT SECURITY – IT'S ABOUT CARE, COORDINATION, AND COMPASSION.

Transit agencies are deeply committed to making transit safe, welcoming, and inclusive, but these efforts are no longer only about security. They are about human need, dignity, and public responsibility.

On the Front Line: Keeping Transit Safe offers a first-of-its-kind, national look at how front-line workers are navigating this complexity and what it will take to move forward.

Without coordinated support from federal and provincial governments, particularly in housing, mental health, and substance use, transit systems will continue to be overwhelmed. We need sustained investments and partnerships to create long-term, systemic change.

We remain committed to doing our part. But to truly deliver safe transit systems for all, we need our government partners to provide support.

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