

Summer ➤ Fall 2006

GO

News



GO Transit's newsletter for customers



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The day the trains stopped running

On Friday, July 14, 2006, a little after 2 p.m., a freight train derailed on CN tracks near Mimico GO Station. The derailment caused freight cars to jackknife and roll over across all four tracks on this line, which is used by GO, VIA, and freight trains. Luckily, no one was injured, and the

freight cars were empty, but the tracks were severely damaged by the accident. Here's why it had such a large effect on GO Train service: The derailment happened between Willowbrook, our main train storage and maintenance yard, and Union Station.

Most of our train service takes place during rush hours, early in the morning and late in the afternoon. In between, most of our trains are stored in yards to be serviced, cleaned, refuelled, and inspected. The biggest yard, housing almost all of our fleet, is Willowbrook. The derailment closed the tracks leading out of the yard, blocking most of our fleet from service. Until the lengthy cleanup of the derailment was finished, two-thirds of our trains were trapped inside Willowbrook.

The incident caused major upheaval to our customers, and we are keenly aware of this. Our customer service staff are responding to all the calls and emails we've been getting, and certain questions have come up over and over again. We'd like to take this opportunity to explain why things happened the way they did during such an unforeseen disruption.

"I was travelling eastbound... Since the derailment occurred in the west end at Mimico, I do not understand why it took over two hours for a train to arrive."

The derailment occurred at the worst possible location on our system. It not only blocked all tracks on the Lakeshore West line, but also stopped our trains from getting out of the storage yard. Most of our trains couldn't get to Union Station to carry customers on their afternoon trips home. During the

afternoon rush hour, we normally carry about 65,000 riders, the equivalent of 48 highway lanes of car traffic. The trains we had available (those that were already in service elsewhere on the system or stored at other locations) had nowhere near the capacity to handle the usual number of customers.

In the next year or two, GO will be storing trains to the east of Union Station. This, in combination with trains now stored west of Union Station and more off-peak train service, will mean that our overall system will be more protected from major service disruptions.

*"None of the email messages that I received mentioned anything about the trains that **were** able to get around the incident, although someone who did get through to your overwhelmed website saw that notification of some trains was there."*

We're pleased that customers are taking advantage of our E-News email notification service (we now have over 20,000 subscribers), and that they are checking the constantly updated service status page on our website. We did have temporary problems with these systems on July 14 due to an unusually high number of people trying to access our website. We will be improving this system to provide more access to our customers.

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The day the trains stopped running

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We were able to run some train trips during the afternoon, using the small number of trains that weren't trapped by the derailment. These trains were able to provide very limited service in the late afternoon and evening. They couldn't run on the usual schedule, and some train runs were approved by CN or CPR with only minutes to spare before departure. Waiting crowds at Union Station were already very large, so it was not a good idea to bring more people to the area by notifying them with further E-News messages. That would have caused even more disappointment for customers to rush to Union Station only to find that their train was full, or suddenly unavailable.

“Lack of information to your riders was anything but good PR.”

We regret that many customers didn't find out about the disruption until it was too late to make alternative travel arrangements.

We did do our best to get the word out to as many people as possible, as soon as possible. We notified all local radio and television media as soon as we heard about the derailment. As events unfolded, GO staff — at stations, on buses, and on the phone — provided the best information they could in a confusing situation. Many customers thanked us for sending them detailed information via E-News. We suggest that all regular customers who rely on GO Transit to get to and from work sign up for this free service (find out how at gotransit.com). We're also investigating ways to extend our passenger information signs into PATH, downtown Toronto's underground walkway system, to give even more advance notice of service disruptions.

“Some GO staff told the several hundred lining up for buses that GO was not putting on any extra bus service.”

Most of our bus fleet gets used every afternoon for regular service. We did

bring in all the available buses we had, and even got help from the private bus industry. With these resources, we moved almost 7,000 people over the course of the afternoon and evening by bus. Unfortunately, this is about the same number that can be carried on three to four rush-hour GO Trains, and we usually run more than 45 trains during a typical rush hour. To carry the GO crowd in buses would have required almost 1,000 more bus trips. This was impossible, so we had to ask our customers to look for travel alternatives to get home.

“Why can’t you start making improvements and stop making excuses all the time for why you don’t have backup emergency services?”

We do have contingency plans, and they were put into action as soon as we got word of the derailment. It is just not possible (or practical) to have a “spare GO system” in wait, in case of a major event like this one.

The only truly effective contingency plan, for those rare and unforeseeable incidents like the one on July 14, is for customers to have an alternative travel plan — just in case. Delays and disruptions *will* happen. Have another method planned for your trip, just as you would for a snowstorm or when you need to get home earlier. Here are some suggestions:

- Sign up for E-News to make sure you're informed as quickly as possible
- Depending on the incident, try to catch an earlier train or bus
- Arrange backup child care or pet care that you can call on when needed
- Find two or three people who live or work near you and arrange a carpool or taxi group as a backup
- Find out about other transit system options and ways to take local transit as close to your destination as possible — it may take longer, but you'll still get home

A look around GO

GO green

At GO Transit, we take our responsibility as an environmentally friendly organization seriously. We know our customers have a choice of transportation methods, and that many of you have easy access to at least one car.

You know that taking GO is often cheaper than driving, and that it gives you time to relax on your way to and from your destination. But we want to make sure you're informed about another good reason to get on the GO — the environment.

Did you know that one GO Train carrying 1,600 passengers can move as many people as 1,400 cars?

To show our support for initiatives that protect the planet, GO has participated in some recent national and international environmental events.

April 22, 2006, was international Earth Day. The City of Toronto celebrated with its annual 20-Minute Toronto Makeover, and GO got in on the action by picking up litter around Union Station.

June 7, 2006, was Clean Air Day. GO gave customers a reason to stick with us by

- Keep important phone numbers and email addresses with you, including those for GO information, local transit, and taxi companies that serve the regions along your route

We hope that nothing like this CN freight train derailment will happen again, but the truth is, there's no way of knowing if or when major incidents will occur. We do our best, but things will never run altogether smoothly during an emergency or an incident out of our control. Each time something like this happens, we use it as an opportunity to come up with ways of dealing with it better the next time. Thank you for your many constructive comments, including your thanks and support during, and after, this challenging episode.

hosting a welcome and appreciation event at Pickering GO Station. We thanked our customers for making the environmentally responsible choice by greeting them in the morning with cookies, coffee, bottled water, and loot bags.

Who knew saving the planet could be so much fun?

Winners on the GO!

There's more to GO Transit than a trip to work and back. If you're paying attention — checking out our ads in the paper, looking at the posters in our trains and stations, and logging onto gotransit.com — you could be in for some fabulous prizes!

We recently held a contest with the Molson Grand Prix of Toronto in which five lucky GO customers won tickets to the race. They were able to get there with ease, thanks to the extra train service we ran to Exhibition over that weekend.

We also held an Earth Day contest on our website in April. Customers spotted our Earth Day trivia quiz in newspaper ads and on gotransit.com, then submitted their answers online. The winner received a GO prize pack including an adult monthly pass.

Thanks for not smoking

We'd like to remind passengers that GO Transit is now smoke-free everywhere, including all platforms. You may now smoke in designated smoking areas only.

For many years, smoking has been prohibited on our trains and buses, in GO station and bus terminal buildings, inside shelters, and on the platforms in Union Station. With the Smoke-Free Ontario Act becoming law on May 31, 2006, smoking is no longer allowed on any bus and train platforms or any other pedestrian area. You may smoke in outdoor parking lots, including the kiss & ride lanes.

Thank you for respecting the health and comfort of all GO passengers. We appreciate it!

Is a public transit career in your future?

The members of the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) have created a scholarship awards fund for individuals with a career path in the public transit industry. The awards encourage career awareness and opportunities within public transit, in order to sustain growth throughout the industry.

Five \$2,000 scholarships will be awarded in 2006. All submissions must be received no later than 16:00 EST on Thursday, September 14, 2006. The scholarship application form can be

downloaded from the What's New? section on the GO Transit website at gotransit.com, or from the CUTA website at cutaactu.ca.

Students who are registered full-time in a post-secondary school or CEGEP may apply. Applications are encouraged from those students whose studies will lead them towards a career in public transit. Some examples are: mechanic/technical operations, information technology and support, urban planning, public policy and administration, or marketing/communications.

gotransit.com tips to help with your commute

It's easy to explore the GO website. Use the list of items down the left-hand side of the home page and the centre boxes. Here's a look at some of the features that could help you with your commute.

Looking for information about significant changes or interruptions to regular scheduled train and bus trips? Check out the **Current Train and Bus Status** section under **Train and Bus Status**. This page provides information about incidents or delays that significantly affect train and bus service.

You've got mail! Last year we introduced E-News, an email alert service to notify you of significant service changes and interruptions, as well as routine GO info that affects your commute. This opt-in email service will tell you about disruptions (such as the July 14 CN derailment) as we become aware of them, giving you as much notice as possible to make alternative plans for your commute. To sign up, check out the E-News box on the home page. Subscribing is easy.

Another incentive for monthly pass holders

The recent federal budget included an important new tax credit for Canadians who buy monthly passes.

The credit took effect on July 1, 2006, and will help offset your commuting costs. Claiming the tax credit on your income tax return is easy. Simply keep your monthly passes from July onward. Your GO monthly pass will be the receipt for income tax purposes. We will not issue special receipts or replace

lost passes, so please make sure to hold on to them.

Not all transit systems' passes meet all the conditions for claiming the credit, and a separate receipt may be needed in addition to your pass. If you ride another transit system to and from GO, please make sure to check with that system.

For more information about the new credit, check the Canada Revenue Agency's website at cra-arc.gc.ca.



Courteous Commuter

Dear Courteous Commuter,

I know the seating policy on trains and buses is first-come, first-served, but does this extend to inanimate objects? I often get on my crowded train to find that all seats are occupied, but some of them are occupied by people's bags! This hardly seems fair: Shouldn't I, a paying customer, get priority over a gym bag that hasn't bought a ticket?

~ Bags Aren't People Too

Dear Bags Aren't People Too,

Good point. We think it's common sense that humans should get first dibs as far as seats on our trains and buses are concerned. It's likely that when this has happened to you, it's simply that the bag's owner hasn't been paying attention. We're willing to bet that if you smile politely and glance at the seat that should be yours, they'll quickly get the message.

~ CC

Dear Courteous Commuter,

Like many of your customers, I take the train home in the afternoon from Union Station. I often get nervous about the way people crowd certain sections of the platform when we're waiting for the train to arrive. There are so many people jostling for position, I'm afraid that someone innocently walking by (like me!) could get bumped. I know customers really want to get on the train quickly so that they'll get a seat, but shouldn't safety come first?

~ Needs Some Space

Dear Needs Some Space,

Definitely. Safety is always GO Transit's number one priority. We understand that, at the end of a long day, our customers want their trip home to be as easy as possible. But just think what could happen if someone got nudged or shuffled too close to the edge of the platform — the consequences could be tragic. This is why we ask you to stay in the concourse and keep an eye on the display monitors, which will tell you when it's time to head up to the tracks. Once you're at track level, please move away from the escalators, elevators, and stairs, and spread out along the entire length of the platform.

~ CC



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