

“We’re spinning our wheels with no traction”: Police and Transit Peace Officer Experiences with  
and Perceptions of Violence, Safety, and Vulnerable Persons on Transit

by

Rachel Geldart

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Department of Sociology  
University of Alberta

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## Abstract

Extant scholarly work has explored multiple aspects of transit safety and security issues. It tends to focus on increasing actual or perceived safety on public transit, including crime prevention through environmental design and increasing safety for vulnerable transit users and community members (e.g., women, people experiencing homelessness). However, much less is known about how police and peace officers perceive and experience policing public transit (on buses, light rapid transit (LRT) train cars, in stations/centres), especially in the Canadian context. To uncover these nuances, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 Edmonton Police Service (EPS) police officers, 16 Edmonton transit peace officers (TPOs), one high-ranking City of Edmonton employee, and one outreach worker from a local social agency. Results show that police officers *and* TPOs experienced a *dual failure* in their official and unofficial policing duties. First, due to a perceived lack of authority, officers felt unable to enforce transit bylaws and could not rely on the criminal justice system to enact appropriate consequences. As such, they felt unable to provide and ensure safety on transit for the public, vulnerable people, and themselves. Second, officers believed existing social services were often inappropriate, unavailable, and inaccessible for vulnerable people, especially those who needed immediate care, which limited their options to divert individuals in crisis out of the transit system. When officers offered help to vulnerable people (e.g., transport to services, treatment resources, etc.), they received constant refusals. Both police officers and TPOs felt extremely ineffective at keeping transit safe *and* providing suitable alternatives to transit, fuelling feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, and cynicism. Findings suggest the urgent and critical need for increased integration of law enforcement and social agencies to improve safety outcomes on transit and provide vulnerable people with proper care.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Rachel Geldart. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Challenges and Rewards of Helping Others: Experiences of Police and Peace Officers in Edmonton’s Transit System,” ID No. Pro00120686, June 7th, 2022.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

“State of Edmonton’s LRT system frustrates, shocks riders” is one of many headlines that dominated Edmonton news outlets from 2021-2022 and continues to pervade current media headlines. Several violent attacks on transit were reported to police during this time, including—but not limited to—hate-motivated threats of physical assault against Muslim women, two separate stabbing incidents, and a senior being pushed onto the LRT train tracks (Cook, 2021; Wakefield, 2021; Junker, 2022; Taniguchi, 2022). Stabbings on transit property have continued well into 2023, one instance of which was fatal, where a 52-year-old father of seven was killed at a northern LRT station (Junker, 2023; Mertz, 2023a). As a result, the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) has urged residents and transit passengers to exercise extreme caution while on the transit system and downtown Edmonton streets (Johnson, 2023a).

Transit safety issues are not unique to Edmonton. They are well documented in the literature (Easteal & Wilson, 1991, Litman, 2014; Smith & Clarke, 2000; Wachs et al., 2015) and are a growing concern in Canada (Hopper, 2023) and other countries such as the United States and England (Jenkins & Butterworth, 2022; Lydall, 2023). Many cities have recently reported increased crime on their transit system, such as robberies, assaults, stabbings, and gun violence (Cipriano, 2022; Harris, 2023; O’Brien, 2023). In addition to rising crime levels, transit workers and riders have expressed displeasure with the amount of social disorder they witness on public transportation, such as the presence of garbage, human feces/urine, blocked pathways/elevators, and open drug use (Davis & Beckstrom, 2023; Draaisma, 2023; Ewasuk, 2022; Teale, 2021). With the widespread perception that public transportation systems are unsafe, many transit passengers across Canada feel forced into finding alternative modes of transportation (Black, 2022a; Yun, 2023).

However, not everyone can choose to drive to their destination or select the more expensive taxi or ride-share option. While public transit is a vital travel resource for commuting residents and workers, it is *especially* crucial for marginalized, low-income individuals who cannot own a personal vehicle (Bureau & Glachant, 2011). Indeed, two Edmontonians stabbed on transit property in early 2023 were immigrants to Canada and were attacked during their daily commute to/from work. Access to public transportation has been shown to significantly reduce food insecurity and increase chances of obtaining employment (Baek, 2016; Lichtenwalter et al., 2006). Additionally, individuals experiencing homelessness often rely on public transit, utilizing it to access resources in/beyond the city, search for jobs and/or housing, avoid dangerous areas, or meet with loved ones (Scott et al., 2020). With growing homeless populations, limited shelter capacity and their often-unsanitary conditions, as well as other unfavourable aspects of accessing shelter spaces, many people experiencing homelessness are forced to utilize underground train stations, LRT platforms, train cars, buses, and covered bus stops for shelter and warmth, including overnight (Daly & Yeung, 2022; Gordon, 2022; The Local, 2018; Keynan et al., *n.d.*; Villani, 2021). Considering how Edmonton’s winter temperatures consistently average below zero degrees Celsius—and can dip below negative forty with wind chill—people staying outdoors (or on a transit platform without proper heating) is especially concerning. However, the (sometimes extended) presence of these individuals on transit property has prompted health and safety concerns from transit agencies, staff, and riders, especially during the height of COVID-19 (Jaffe & Gowen, 2020; CBC News, 2020).

The most notable actors under scrutiny for these issues in Edmonton are EPS members and transit peace officers (TPOs). While acknowledging increased concerns with crime, disorder, and safety on public transit, the EPS and City of Edmonton are currently at odds as to the reason

for this increase and the most appropriate response. The EPS blamed the City of Edmonton for removing Bylaw 8353's loitering clause in 2021, which City Council unanimously agreed on in response to media coverage and public outcry about police officers and TPOs forcibly removing Indigenous persons and racial minorities from transit stations (Chacon, 2021; Edmonton City Council, 2021). This bylaw previously allowed officers to displace individuals not using transit for its 'intended purpose' out of transit stations; rescinding it no longer afforded officers the power to move individuals out of the stations or issue loitering tickets. In response, the City of Edmonton transit unions posit that the scale-back of police presence on transit and staffing shortages due to COVID-19 were the problem (Krause, 2022; Konguavi, 2022). Curiously, the data these two groups have shared with the public is contradictory; police data released in 2021 documents an increase in severe crime on the LRT system compared to the city's average crime trend, while Edmonton Transit System statistics show reported incidents dropping since the spring of 2021 (Boothby, 2022). Despite their differing views, LRT safety has ignited widespread public concern and outcry across the City in recent years.

In response to public unease on transit, the City of Edmonton drafted a plan in 2022 that was intended to improve safety in the transit system, which included hiring six additional transit peace officers to manage safety incident responses. While Edmonton's mayor, Amarjeet Sohi, expressed his belief in the effectiveness of the City's safety plan, he ultimately acknowledged that crime related to the transit system stems from the lack of investment in supportive housing as well as mental health and addiction issues (Amato, 2022a). As such, Edmonton's municipal leadership appears to be recognizing the limits of law-and-order approaches in the policing of the city's transit system and those most likely to seek shelter there. Nevertheless, it remains to be



seen whether the formal recognition of the broader social issues that underpin transit problems will produce change.

Indeed, law enforcement officials disproportionately deal with society's most vulnerable (Sanders & Hannem, 2012) and are increasingly called upon to manage marginalized community members who may be street-involved (Deukmedjian, 2013), have a mental illness and/or a substance use disorder (Oriola et al., 2012; Urbanik et al., 2022), and/or have histories of physical/sexual victimization (Messing et al., 2014; Meyer, 2011). Despite the recognition of these intersecting structural vulnerabilities (Coleman & Cotton, 2012), many resources for people experiencing homelessness within the community (e.g., shelters, supervised consumption services, housing programs, job training, and mental health counselling) are neither available, accessible, nor desirable. Without meaningful collaborations across health, social, and justice systems, law enforcement officers may continue to ineffectively interact with vulnerable community members and potentially perpetuate harmful policing practices (Bucerius et al., 2022; Butler et al., 2022).

The lack of resources for marginalized community members, people experiencing homelessness, and/or people who use drugs is especially salient in the Alberta context, where the provincial United Conservative Party (UCP) cut funding for family resources, social supports, harm reduction, and housing services and continue to do so in 2024 (Greene et al. 2022; Greene et al. 2023; Siever, 2022). Among cuts to education, childcare programs, and municipal funding (Stolte, 2020; CBC News, 2020), the UCP also announced that the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) payment program—which many people experiencing homelessness utilize—would no longer increase with inflation and the rising cost of living (Johnson, 2019), plunging disadvantaged community members further into poverty.

The UCP's budget cuts negatively impacted several services that vulnerable Albertans rely on, such as homeless foundations, shelters, social support, food services, counselling, women's centres, and more (Hudes, 2019; Villani, 2019). In addition, the UCP recently closed three supervised consumption services (SCS) across the province, including one in Edmonton, as well as the only SCS in Lethbridge, which was the busiest in North America (Opinko, 2020; Cook & Smith, 2021; Smith, 2021; Greene et al. 2023). In response to the SCS closures, those with addiction issues are often forced to consume in public and private spaces (Greene et al. 2023; Maier et al., 2024). In Edmonton, people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton admitted LRT stations have transformed into makeshift SCS sites, not only because the space is high-visibility and they would get help more quickly in the event of an overdose, but also because it is a space where they can use drugs in relative warmth during colder temperatures (Black, 2022a).

Cuts to social programs in Alberta have made it increasingly difficult for officers to balance recovery and harm reduction efforts with the needs of the broader community, who often desire more punitive measures. Businesses and residents of affected areas have called for increased police presence and government support to combat the growing disorder in Edmonton, such as needles on the sidewalk, broken windows, and slashed tires (Baig, 2022; CBC News, 2021). When funding for shelters and other social services is limited, they often fail to address the needs of a rapidly growing homeless population and force unhoused persons to spend their time elsewhere, which can potentially exacerbate safety and disorder issues on transit (Ding et al., 2022). Further complicating matters, Alberta's conservative provincial government and Edmonton's liberal municipal government are often at ideological odds and rarely agree on a collaborative solution to these issues, often resulting in inaction (Querengesser, 2023).

The Edmonton Transit System is a critical part of keeping communities connected and productive. Vulnerable populations and those living in poverty heavily rely on public transportation as it is their sole/primary means of navigating the city and, sometimes, for survival. However, the presence of some of these individuals on transit and in LRT stations, as well as increasing crime rates on public transportation, has prompted safety concerns from the public, who are understandably confused about who is responsible for policing Edmonton's transit system. As such, this project aims to explore and understand how *both* police and peace officers experience policing transit, as well as gather their perspectives on the challenges they face, what can be done to mitigate these challenges, and what changes can improve Edmonton's transit system.

The highly interconnected nature of transit law enforcement with other systems (e.g., political bodies, welfare and social services, healthcare, etc.), necessitates using general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950) to situate officers' experiences and perceptions within their broader environment. von Bertalanffy (1972) defines a 'system' as "a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment" (p. 417). For example, all populations, agencies, and organizations that participants interact with are subsystems under one overarching system. In his description of general systems theory, von Bertalanffy (1950, p. 148) posits that it is impossible to "sum up the behaviour of the whole from the isolated parts." As such, scholars must "take into account the relations between the various subordinated systems and the systems which are super-ordinated to them in order to understand the behaviour of the parts" (p. 148). In other words, a system behaves as a *whole*; a change in one element alters the entire system, and every element of a system depends on all the others to function properly and in tandem. Scholars in various fields, including healthcare, education, and criminology, have

utilized systems theory to situate observed phenomena within a wider social milieu (Butler et al., 2022; Cotton & Coleman, 2014; Kim et al., 2023; Valiente et al., 2020).

In Chapter Five, in conjunction with general systems theory, I utilize Sennett and Cobb's (1973) seminal work, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, to establish and explain the emotional consequences officers may face when operating within the broader system. Sennett and Cobb (1973) argue that "class is a system for limiting freedom" and dignity across both "powerful" and "weak" groups (p. 28). Accordingly, law enforcement officers would fit into both groups, as they "must obey [the] commands" of those above them and are also "constricted within the circle of action that maintains their power" when dealing with the public (p. 28). Yet, simultaneously acting as "judge and judged, [...] individual and member of the mass" may result in the internalization of class conflict, in which "the struggle *between* men leads to struggle *within* each man" (p. 98, emphasis added).

This study fills a critical gap in how law enforcement officers experience policing transit and how they interact with those who habituate transit spaces, particularly people experiencing homelessness and people who use drugs. Much of the existing work on law enforcement interactions with vulnerable community members comes from the perspectives of the marginalized and thus misses the policing angle (except for some key exceptions; see Butler, 2022; Ratcliffe & Wight, 2022). As a western Canadian city that has been deeply impacted by increased transit violence, homelessness, and the drug toxicity crisis, Edmonton serves as a prime location to explore the intricacies of how officers conceive of their role in both policing transit and providing help to those in need.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Public transportation is essential to any city, as it enhances resident and visitor mobility via infrastructure such as buses, subways, and light rapid transit (LRT) cars. Not only does public transit facilitate travel within and between municipalities, but it also provides a means of accessing a range of public services, recreation facilities, social activities, and employment and educational opportunities. The benefits of public transit systems are extensive and diverse; they can increase accessibility, encourage social inclusion, reduce traffic congestion, and decrease carbon emissions. Importantly, public transit also provides a cost-effective transportation option for people who do not drive, do not have a car, and/or cannot afford one (Bureau & Glachant, 2011). When access to reliable public transportation is hindered, this significantly reduces people's ability to connect to healthcare, employment/education opportunities, and social services, negatively affecting quality of life (Currie et al., 2009; Li et al., 2012; Shay et al., 2016; Stafford & Tye, 2023). As such, many countries (e.g., Canada, England, Italy, South Africa, Indonesia, Germany, the United States, India, etc.) have heavily invested in efforts to encourage patrons to utilize their public transportation systems via refurbishing transit stations, implementing innovative technology, and expanding transit routes to maximize ridership (C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, 2021; Institute for Transportation & Development Policy, 2021; Government of Canada, 2020).

Notably, transit systems also have the potential to shape crime patterns in urban areas (Piza & Kennedy, 2003). Patterned activity within and beyond transit stations, density of use, design/architecture of stations, and the general environment transit stations are situated in can contribute to transit stations' criminogenic nature (Ceccato, 2013). Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) posit that transit stations can act as crime 'generators' and 'attractors.'

Crime generators are areas where “large numbers of people are attracted for reasons unrelated to any particular level of criminal motivation they might have or to any particular crime they might end up committing” (p. 7). Examples of crime generators in Edmonton could include the downtown core, West Edmonton Mall, or Rogers Place. These locations—transit stations included—can increase the likelihood of crime by concentrating people in specific places during specific times when certain criminal acts are made more feasible, such as theft or pickpocketing (Newton et al., 2015). Crime attractors, on the other hand, are settings that “create well-known criminal opportunities to which strongly motivated, intending criminal offenders are attracted because of the known opportunities for particular types of crime” (p. 8). Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) provide examples such as bar districts, drug markets, or large insecure parking lots in commercial areas, where offenders seek a specific location to commit their intended crime. In Edmonton, this could include unsecured transit parking locations or university campuses.

While transit centres and stations can provide a convenient *opportunity* to commit crime or be *sought out* for criminal activity, they may also be a method of transportation used to commit crimes. Research demonstrating transit’s impact on crime is mixed. Measuring both above-ground and below-ground theft offences in London, UK’s mass transit system, Newton and colleagues (2014) found when stations had higher levels of theft, the surrounding environment tended to have similarly high levels of theft, especially at certain stations during peak times. However, there is mixed evidence on whether the presence of a transit station/shelter in a community will lead to increased crime levels (Tay et al., 2013). Despite popular opinion, some studies did not find evidence that public transit increases crime or transfers crime from poor to affluent neighbourhoods (e.g., Billings et al., 2011; Ihlanfeldt, 2003). However, other

research demonstrates the opposite—for example, Phillips and Sandler (2015) found strong evidence determining that the closure of one transit station in Washington, D.C. reduced crime at other stations along the same route but did not affect crime rates at other stations, suggesting that transit may be utilized by people committing crimes in various locations within a city. Accordingly, it is possible and likely that there are space-based differences in the effects that transit stations have on crime.

Apart from crime statistics, which are often purported to measure the ‘true’ extent of crime and disorder, people’s *perceptions* of crime and victimization can have meaningful effects on their behaviours (Urbanik et al. 2017). If people *feel* that transit is unsafe—irrespective of actual crime levels—they may be less inclined to use transit, consistent with Thomas and Thomas’ (1928) assertion that “if a person perceives a situation as real, it is real in its consequence” (p. 572). As such, establishing riders’ feelings of safety on transportation systems is a growing concern for districts and municipalities who want to promote transit use (Anchan, 2023; Fink et al., 2005; Griffin & Alhmidi, 2023; Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2006; Waugh, 2004). A range of factors can influence whether people choose to ride transit, such as cleanliness, the behaviour of transit personnel, and feelings of comfort and safety (Lai & Chen, 2011; van Lierop et al., 2018). Indeed, people of all ages have reported feeling unsafe in subway stations while waiting for their transportation to arrive (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2012; Wiebe et al., 2015). Feeling safe on transit is especially important for socially marginalized groups, including but not limited to women and individuals identifying as LGBTQ2S+, as they often face increased amounts of verbal and/or sexual harassment and violent attacks on transit (Dunckel Graglia, 2016; Lubitow et al., 2017; Pedersen, 2020). When there is a perception that using transit is unsafe or dangerous,

people often choose alternate transportation options (Ravensbergen et al., 2020; Simons et al., 2014) or they simply avoid using public transit altogether (Ceccato et al., 2023).

### *Transit Officers*

Personnel responsible for transit security and safety have existed in some form or another since public transportation's conception. For example, after the London Underground opened in 1863, the railway hired police officers to patrol the tracks and ensure passenger safety (Peedle, n.d.). Along with checking fare, the London Metropolitan Police were also charged with inspecting public transit vehicles. While technically this was to check vehicle safety standards, it also provided an opportunity to regulate passenger behaviour (Barker & Robbins, 1963).

Pickpocketing seemed to be the most documented type of crime on transit in several jurisdictions across Europe and North America, although escalating crime occurred into the 1900s, such as vandalism, robbery, assault, and murder (Huerta, 1990). In response, several police precincts began to authorize transit systems to hire their officers or implement their own security personnel. In the United States, Pennsylvania was one of the first to authorize a transit police force in 1901, followed by New Jersey in 1904 (Huerta, 1990). Surprisingly, New York did not implement a specialized transit police department until 1953. Today, nearly all American jurisdictions have personnel tasked with policing transit and keeping people safe.

Canada's first dedicated transit police service was introduced in Vancouver in 1890 when the British Columbia Electric Railway employed watchmen to protect their depots and power plants (Metro Vancouver Transit Police, 2023). When Vancouver's SkyTrain began operating in 1985, Special Provincial Constables were appointed to the transit system—these officers did not carry firearms but could arrest rulebreakers and serve violation tickets. As the system expanded, the Special Constables found they did not have enough authority to properly respond to growing



security and safety issues. Namely, they could not enforce drug laws and were confined to transit property, so they could not assist in matters just outside of transit property (Metro Vancouver Transit Police, 2023). By 2005, many of the Special Constables transitioned into fully qualified police officers, with additional officers added in 2009 in anticipation of the 2010 Olympic Games. In 2015, Vancouver's Transit Police service expanded so significantly that they now have two separate divisions, each with its own inspector. Currently, the Vancouver Transit System is the only Canadian transit service that has a police team dedicated to it. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) employs Special Constables, who do not carry firearms but have the full powers of a police officer, such as the ability to enforce Acts related to mental health, liquor use, and trespassing on TTC property (Toronto Transit Commission, 2023).

In Edmonton, from 2015 to 2019, the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) had an LRT Beats team of one sergeant and eight constables who would patrol the entire LRT network. Within their first 18 months of operation, they laid 755 criminal charges and executed over 1000 outstanding warrants (Hampshire, 2016). In a media release, an EPS Inspector announced that since the team's inception, calls for service on transit decreased while warrant execution and proactive identification of offenders increased (Global News, 2018). Despite the apparent success of LRT Beats, the program ended abruptly in 2019, and there is little public information available explaining the team's dissolution. Several former LRT Beats police officers expressed similar confusion as to why the EPS ended the program, especially given the range of transit safety and security concerns they continued to encounter. Currently, the main safety personnel presence specifically dedicated to serving Edmonton's transit system are contract security officers and transit peace officers.

TPOs are employed by the City of Edmonton to patrol Edmonton Transit System (ETS) vehicles and property, including buses, LRT train cars, and transit stations/centres. According to the City's website, TPOs "help create safe environments, provide customer assistance, and promote fare compliance" (City of Edmonton, 2023). They provide 24/7 uniformed coverage on the system, and carry a baton and pepper spray, though they do not carry firearms. They can enforce municipal bylaws and some provincial acts, enforcing behaviour by issuing tickets and/or property bans for violations. Initiated in 2007, TPOs were primarily implemented to ensure patrons were paying their fares, especially on the LRT, which uses an honour-based fare collection system. However, as LRT routes expanded with the completed north-to-south Capital Line in 2010 and the northwest Metro Line extension in 2015, so did the transit peace officers' responsibilities.

Peace officers are an example of an actor within what scholars call a 'continuum of policing' (Law Commission, 2006) or 'plural policing' (Johnston, 1993), whereby public police are increasingly supplemented by a multiplicity of law enforcement agents who have their own initiatives/mandates and are controlled via separate organizations/authorities. These agents can include bylaw enforcement officers, private contracted security officers, and 'civilian police' such as neighbourhood watch programs. As Flanagan (2008) reported, "modern policing is carried out in partnership with a wide range of local agencies" (p. 7).

Several scholars attribute the pluralization of policing to the proliferation of neoliberal attitudes in government valuing deficit reduction, common features of which include public service downsizing, social program cuts, and service delivery restructuring (Clark, 2002; Crawford, 2003; Loader & Walker, 2007; van Stokkom & Terpstra, 2018). Others argue that the growth of 'mass private property' in North America has resulted in the 'privatization of public

space,' shedding light on the hiring of private security firms to police privately-owned property that relies on public access and use (e.g., shopping malls, recreation centres, grocery stores, etc.) (Shearing & Stenning, 1981). Despite the ETS being publicly owned and operated by the City of Edmonton, it functions similarly to that of 'mass private property,' especially with the implementation of proof-of-payment areas and transit peace officers (also employed by the City) who patrol the space and enforce fines for fare evasion. Several scholars have argued how bylaw enforcement officers, under the guise of managing property, ultimately function within a 'regulatory grey zone' to regulate and control people (Martino et al., 2023; Ranasinghe & Valverde, 2006; Valverde, 2005). Indeed, the increased privatization of public space significantly impacts the mobility of the public, particularly people experiencing homelessness or other marginalized persons, as they may be considered unappealing users of public space since they often "transgress the line that separates public from private" (Kohn, 2004, p. 161; see also Geldart et al., n.d.; Greene et al., 2022; Maier et al., 2024).

While official data on transit peace officer experiences during the late 2000s and early 2010s is limited, by their accounts, they mostly dealt with low-level disorder during this time, such as passengers evading fare, people sleeping on buses, and individuals intoxicated from alcohol. News articles discussing transit safety in Edmonton did not start proliferating in earnest until 2014, with the introduction of the Transit and Police Partnership (TAPP). This was a joint initiative between transit peace officers and police officers proposed to enhance public safety and security on public transportation, primarily in the northern LRT stations (CBC News, 2014; Nicholson, 2014). It consisted of four EPS constables and four TPOs who focused on high visibility patrols, crime suppression, and education in and around transit vehicles/property (Hoglund & Kachkowski, 2019). During the six-month trial period from July 2014 to January

2015, officers reported benefits of the partnership, such as increased intelligence sharing between the two organizations and improved public perception of safety. Police officers were also able to become more familiar with people who frequently used transit. However, officers also reported several drawbacks to the joint task force, namely their differences in training and experience, TPOs' lack of authority compared to police, TPOs' inability to access EPS reporting systems, and the risk of TPOs responding to high-priority EPS calls without the proper training, tools, and equipment (Hoglund & Kachkowski, 2019). Rather than continuing with the partnership, the EPS launched its LRT Beats team in July 2015.

While police officers and TPOs sometimes work together (e.g., warrant execution blitzes), joint efforts to promote safety on transit between the two organizations are infrequent and inconsistent. Oftentimes, their interactions are brief—if TPOs are trying to write a ticket to someone who refuses to identify themselves, TPOs sometimes must call the police to come identify them, as police officers have enhanced access to the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC). Since TPOs are not equipped to deal with altercations involving known weapons, they need to call police in those instances as well. For both officer groups, the demarcation between the two law enforcement roles is clear: TPOs manage transit's low-level social disorder and nuisance calls while police officers only step in for criminal investigations and weapons calls. Yet, despite their differing authorities, both police and transit peace officers still deal with vulnerable groups in transit spaces, such as people experiencing homelessness and people who use drugs, who often frequent and sometimes sleep in transit stations.

### *Homelessness on Transit*

Homelessness is a widespread social concern in Canada. Over 200,000 individuals may experience homelessness in any given year, while anywhere between 25,000 and 35,000 people

may be experiencing homelessness on a single night (Strobel et al., 2021). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness appears to be increasing in many countries—the same is true in Edmonton, where homelessness rates have more than doubled since 2019 (Homeward Trust, 2023). 3,137 people are currently homeless in Edmonton, which is the highest rate the city has recorded in over twenty years, including the economic crisis in 2008 (Homeward Trust, 2023). This number is likely an undercount, given the challenges in documenting the number of unhoused people. Homeless populations tend to proliferate in urban environments, congregating in spaces close to various social services, or what De Giorgi (2014) calls “service ghettos.” Given that transit systems serve cities and their urban areas, the presence of unhoused community members is a common occurrence on transit. In a survey of US-based transit agencies, the majority perceived homelessness on transit has increased since the pandemic (Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2020).

Beyond those who are otherwise marginalized, people experiencing homelessness, in particular, are often heavily reliant on public transportation to move around the city. Access to public transit is extremely crucial for this population, as it can be an important tool in utilizing social services, such as food banks, housing, and employment opportunities (Hui & Habib, 2016; Scott et al., 2020). Without it, people experiencing homelessness may find it difficult to obtain/maintain work, make/keep social, mental, and physical health appointments, and meet their daily needs (Brallier et al., 2019). Recognizing the importance of access to transit for many people experiencing homelessness or those at risk of experiencing homelessness, the City of Edmonton funds a program called Providing Accessible Transit Here (PATH), where eligible vulnerable persons can obtain a free monthly transit pass (City of Edmonton, 2023; The Mustard Seed, 2018).

However, mobility is not the only reason why people experiencing homelessness may use transit vehicles and spaces. Nichols and Cázares (2011) surveyed 49 people experiencing homelessness in California, finding that approximately two-thirds of respondents used overnight buses as frequent shelter options. To explain why they opted for staying on transit rather than a designated shelter location, participants expressed dissatisfaction with shelter rules and were concerned about potential shelter victimization (Nichols & Cázares, 2011; see also Keynan et al., n.d.). Just under half of unsheltered individuals in the UK reported they slept in cars, tents, or public transit (Slawson, 2018). In March 2023, Metro Rail in Los Angeles County counted about 800 people sheltering on transit on any given night, with an average of over 500 people moving to city streets when transit vehicles and stations were no longer in service (Scauzillo, 2023). Similarly, research conducted in Minnesota showed that over half of their unsheltered residents were sleeping on transit—these individuals were more likely to be men, 25-54 years old, unemployed, and low income (Wilder Research, 2019). Those sleeping on transit were more likely than other unsheltered individuals to have experienced homelessness for longer, been incarcerated, or have a mental illness or substance addiction (Wilder, 2019). Loukaitou-Sideris and colleagues (2021) found that while transit acts as a shelter for many unhoused individuals in the United States, differences in methodology, climate, service hours, and available shelter space can complicate cross-city comparisons and by extension, cross-country comparisons.

### *Edmonton Context*

Criminological issues in Canada tend to follow broadly similar trends (with some exceptions) to those in the United States, but it would be remiss not to acknowledge the role location and climate play in how people experiencing homelessness interact with and use transit services. Winter temperatures in Edmonton are consistently below zero degrees Celsius, with

extreme temperatures dipping as low as -35 and lower with windchill. People sleeping outdoors are often forced to find indoor shelter so as not to succumb to frostbite or hypothermia. While social services and shelters in Edmonton often increase capacity during emergency weather responses (Konguavi, 2021), they sometimes cannot accommodate such a large influx of people, especially given the growing homeless population (Mertz, 2021). In previous years, the City of Edmonton has allowed vulnerable people to stay in LRT stations during cold snaps in the absence of available shelter beds but has since stated, “LRT stations are not appropriate shelter space as they lack amenities such as heat, and adequate washroom facilities” (Mertz, 2022). Instead, as part of their extreme cold weather plan, the City runs overnight warming buses on nights colder than -20 degrees Celsius, routing between LRT stations/transit centres and available shelters to keep vulnerable people out of the cold. Between November 29 and December 24, 2022, ETS reported that an average of 149 riders utilized the warming buses while the extreme weather response was active (Boothby, 2023).

Despite the measures taken to direct people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton to appropriate sheltering locations and other social services, they continue to be present on transit. In recent years, Edmontonians have increasingly expressed their concern and sometimes outrage with the growing disorder on transit. Transit stations are frequently vandalized, reek of urine and feces, and are littered with needles, garbage, and graffiti, issues often blamed upon unhoused community members (Staples, 2023). In a Global News video, transit riders discussed feeling unsafe in the early morning and evening/night as images showed a destroyed water fountain in an underground transit station, the cracked glass wall of a downtown LRT entrance, and people openly using drugs and sleeping on transit property (Global News, 2022).

It is not only transit passengers who are vocalizing their negative experiences. In November 2022, Edmonton transit drivers fed up with their working conditions released several images of what they see on transit daily (Ewasuk, 2022). The pictures showed people passed out on the floor of buses and LRT stations with bags, carts, and garbage sprawled around them—one notable photo depicts a man in an LRT car lighting something with an open flame. For transit operators, blatant drug use and unruly passengers have become the norm. A veteran bus driver shared that he has been “verbally abused more times than [he] can count” and recently switched to the day shift to ensure his own safety and to “keep sane” (Ewasuk, 2022). Edmonton research has found that people experiencing homelessness *also* feel unsafe on transit, attributing safety issues to the growth of the homeless population, increased gang activity, deterioration of the ‘street code,’ and toxic drug supply (Parsons, 2023).

Some Edmonton residents have advocated for the need for compassion towards people experiencing homelessness in the city, highlighting the structural issues marginalized persons are facing, such as soaring rent prices, unsafe rooming houses, inaccessible mental health and addictions treatment, as well as the considerable trauma they have experienced throughout their lives (Gerein, 2022). Others urge commuters to check on people sleeping in case of a potential overdose (Dubey, 2023a). Indeed, overdose rates have skyrocketed in Alberta, with 613 people dying from opioid poisonings between January and April of 2023, an increase from the 576 deaths recorded in the first four months of 2022 (Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System, 2023). 182 people died from opioid poisoning in April 2023, the highest number of overdose deaths in one month in Alberta’s history (Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System, 2023). Mental Health and Addiction Minister Dan Williams said that more needs to be done to address the opioid crisis, sharing that the United Conservative Party (UCP) has funded several harm



reduction programs such as naloxone distribution, sterile supplies, and the construction of several recovery communities across the province (Dubey, 2023b). However, Edmonton’s mayor Amarjeet Sohi stated that since the Alberta government closed one of Edmonton’s supervised consumption sites, more people are using drugs in transit shelters (Mosleh & Leavitt, 2022). Mayor Sohi further explained how ETS workers monitoring security cameras in the transit stations observed people seeking out and injecting in the cameras’ line of sight so they could be seen and revived if they overdosed. This is consistent with what Black (2022a) discovered when speaking with vulnerable people sheltering in an LRT station.

In response to the growing presence of vulnerable people on transit, the City of Edmonton recently partnered with Bent Arrow, a non-profit focusing on supporting Indigenous people, to form the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT). Together, transit peace officers and outreach workers engage vulnerable people on transit to support and connect them to resources related to housing, mental health, substance use, and financial assistance (City of Edmonton, 2021). Following Calgary Transit’s Community Outreach Team (COT) model, Edmonton implemented its own two-year pilot program in the fall of 2021, beginning with partnerships between two peace officers and two outreach workers. Since then, COTT has been able to help a range of people, including an unhoused man whom they helped to access a detox treatment program and complete paperwork to receive Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), and a man whom they helped with tax refund paperwork and accessing bridge housing (City of Edmonton, 2022a; Fournier, 2022).

The COTT partnership model follows in the footsteps of the Edmonton Police Service’s Human-centred Engagement and Liaison Partnership (HELP) unit, which partners police officers with outreach workers—called ‘Navigators’—to limit the typical ‘arrest, remand, release’ cycle

in Edmonton’s vulnerable population (Edmonton Police Service, 2019). This is an approach that scholars have advocated for (Fry et al., 2002; Lamb et al., 2002), and many police services across the world have begun partnering with mental health professionals to deal with people experiencing homelessness and those struggling with mental health and addiction issues more appropriately (Helfgott, 2016, Horspool et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2015, Shapiro et al., 2015). Preliminary research suggests that unhoused community members in Edmonton appreciate and ‘like’ this initiative (Urbanik et al., n.d.).

Earlier in 2023, EPS Chief Dale McFee acknowledged that homelessness and violence on transit are distinct issues, stating “homeless people don’t, by nature, punch people, stab people, [or] assault people”—rather, there is a separate criminal element present in the transit system: gang members (Antoneshyn, 2023). This claim was also echoed by unhoused community members residing in Edmonton, who believe gang presence and violence has increased in recent years (Parsons, 2023). As such, despite the implementation of HELP and COTT, transit safety issues continue to proliferate. In a submission to CBC News, Tikkala (2022) discussed his experiences on Edmonton transit, recounting an instance where he rode the LRT heading south from downtown on an evening in March. Halfway to his destination, Tikkala described a young man boarding the train—he was wearing a trench coat, holding a baseball bat, and mumbling incoherently about ‘not wanting to take it anymore.’ Tikkala described how fearful he and others in the train car were and how he prepared to endure a swing to the temple. In the article, he condemned the City for its seeming indifference to the growing disorder and safety concerns on transit, claiming it was letting “passengers fend for themselves as incidents pile up—documented and otherwise” (Tikkala, 2022). Other community members have similarly called for increased security measures to foster a sense of safety while riding transit, including a university student

who was bear sprayed at a bus terminal (Black, 2022b), a woman stabbed at an LRT station (Mulcahy, 2023), and an elderly man who was swarmed and assaulted on a bus (Ryan, 2023). Additionally, there have been approximately 40 attacks on transit operators in the first eight months of 2023, the most severe of which occurred in August, when a bus driver was spat on and assaulted for refusing free rides (Romero, 2023).

From 2021 to 2022, EPS statistics report dispatch calls to the transit system increased by 31.4%, with disorder and non-violent calls increasing by 37.2% and 37.6%, respectively (Riebe, 2023a). Calls related to violent crime in the transit system increased by nearly 53%, from 398 calls to 608 (Riebe, 2023a)<sup>1</sup>. These increases are likely partly due to ending COVID-19 lockdowns, wider mobility, and downtown workers returning to the office, producing greater citizen presence on the transit system. However, most violence (70%) reported on transit was classified as ‘random,’ meaning the parties involved did not know one another (Antoneshyn, 2023). EPS Deputy Chief Darren Derko explained that the increase in random violent incidents has strained police resources, affecting prompt response times (Johnson, 2023a).

To better manage growing crime and disorder on transit, the UCP government urged the City of Edmonton earlier this year to transfer control of transit peace officers to the Edmonton Police Service (Huncar, 2023). While City officials said they were open to further discussion, transit union president Steve Bradshaw stated that police are needed to *support* transit peace officers, not to take over entirely. According to him, transferring TPOs to police control has been discussed several times in the past, yet has always been rejected (Huncar, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> Crime statistics are highly variable and dependent on citizen reporting, which are influenced by complex factors ranging from the seriousness of the incident to confidence in the criminal justice system (Baumer & Lauritsen, 2010; Carcach, 1997; Skogan, 1984).

With police officers and TPOs at odds on how to manage crime and disorder on Edmonton's transit system, it is especially pertinent to gather the perceptions of transit safety from the officers *tasked with managing it* (e.g., sworn police officers and transit peace officers) and how they experience their work. Much of the existing literature on transit safety focuses on the role environmental design can play in the prevention of crime (Dubey, 2019; Perlstein & Wachs, 1982), how public transportation influences crime patterns (if at all) (DeAngelo et al., 2019, Tay et al., 2013; Wu & Ridgeway, 2021), and the safety perceptions and experiences of transit passengers (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014; Lubitow et al., 2020; Wiebe et al., 2015; Yavuz & Welch, 2010). While this body of work provides an important foundation, there remains a dearth of empirical research exploring transit safety issues from law enforcement actors' perspectives. Specifically, minimal research has been conducted on how police officers experience policing transit spaces (c.f., Ratcliffe & Wight, 2022). Also absent is research on *transit peace officers* and how they manage safety and disorder. While this research will illuminate the Edmonton context, it will also likely prove informative for other Canadian cities such as Calgary, Winnipeg, and Ottawa that are similarly increasingly opting for peace officers to patrol their transit systems (MacLean, 2023; Pringle, 2021; Thomas, 2023). As police officers and TPOs currently share the policing duties of Edmonton's transit system, I sought to collect *both* groups' perspectives on various transit safety and disorder issues, how they deal with these challenges, and what can be done to mitigate them.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research employs an inductive, open-ended approach, focusing on specific situations, people, and descriptions. It is better suited for understanding participants' perspectives and meanings, how these perspectives shape (and are shaped by) their physical, social, and cultural contexts, and what processes maintain or alter these relationships (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative research has the advantage of generating results that are understandable, credible, and intended to improve existing practices and policies, which is my goal for this study. I utilized in-depth interviews, which aim to “explore the contextual boundaries of experience or perception, to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view” (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 102). As law enforcement agencies can be notoriously difficult for researchers to access (Campeau, 2016; Punch, 1993; Reiner, 2000), I was fortunate to gain rich insights into the lived experience of not only police officers, but also transit peace officers for this study. There is a considerable lack of research on law enforcement officers' in-depth perspectives of policing transit (especially in the Canadian context), so qualitative methods were most fitting for my thesis project.

### *Gaining Research Access*

Conducting research with two separate institutions was time-consuming but highly informative. I submitted a research project proposal to the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) in March 2022. After discussions with their research team, I submitted a revised proposal in May, which was approved at the end of June. The research agreement with the City of Edmonton was drafted in August and finalized in November. I drafted two recruitment emails to prospective participants that the EPS and City of Edmonton sent out on my behalf (see Appendix A), which was further distributed by unit heads, such as sergeants and staff sergeants.

Recruitment proved to be a slow process for both police and peace officers, with only a couple of officers responding to respective initial recruitment emails. As such, most recruitment was facilitated by officers recommending others to participate. Since policing transit is only a small facet of a police officer's daily scope compared to transit peace officers, I believed police officer recruitment might prove more challenging—the LRT crosses through only a few divisions, limiting sample size as well as the possibility of police officers feeling like they had the expertise to speak on transit specifically. I found this hypothesis to be true. Once stakeholders at the City of Edmonton sent a follow-up recruitment email encouraging peace officers to participate, I completed more interviews with peace officers within two weeks than I did with police officers over three months. This large influx of peace officer participants I attribute to an interview I conducted with one peace officer who emailed his colleagues explaining his own experience of the interview, alleviating any potential concerns about participating, and encouraging them to schedule an interview if they wished. Before or after their respective interviews, many subsequent participants mentioned how they wanted to take part in the study because of the officer's email. The increase in interested participants after an 'insider' with "moral suasion" (Seidman, 2019, p. 50) encouraged them to participate—and suggested it was 'safe' to do so—is consistent with other qualitative research on potentially controversial topics or with generally closed off groups (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Browne, 2005; Bucerius & Haggerty, 2019; Loftus, 2010). I am very appreciative of this peace officer's efforts to assist in my recruitment process.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 police officers, 16 transit peace officers (TPOs), a high-ranking City of Edmonton employee, and one outreach worker from a local social service agency. Interviews took place between November 2022 and February 2023.

While TPOs work citywide, most police participants worked in the Downtown Division, which includes a dense concentration of underground LRT stations, as well as the highest population of people experiencing homelessness relative to other locations in the city. Two police officers from other divisions that the LRT passes through also participated. Police officer participants ranged in rank from Constable to Staff Sergeant with an average of 13.5 years of experience. Patrol TPOs and Sergeants averaged 7.1 years of experience. Most police officer participants were men, with only one woman officer participating in the study. Of transit peace officers, except for two women, all participants were male. All police officer participants identified as Caucasian. For TPOs, all but three identified as Caucasian<sup>2</sup>. Four interviews were conducted over Zoom due to scheduling preferences, while all others were conducted in-person, either at the participant's workplace or at a coffee shop.

Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to approximately two and a half hours. Participants were not compensated for their time as interviews took place during work hours. Interviews with police officers averaged one hour and thirteen minutes, while peace officer interviews averaged one hour and twenty-three minutes. Interview questions started quite broadly, with participants detailing why they wanted to join their respective professions and outlining what an average day on the job looked like for them. I then asked questions related specifically to Edmonton's transit and the LRT, such as the types of safety and disorder issues they have experienced in transit stations, challenges in policing transit, and how they perceived the other group's role in transit policing (see Appendix B).

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<sup>2</sup> For ease of reporting demographics, I have included the outreach worker and high-ranking City of Edmonton employee with the TPO group.

All interviews were audio recorded and initially transcribed verbatim (excluding personally identifying information) using Otter.ai, an online transcription service. I listened to each recording and meticulously corrected each transcript as needed, ensuring its accuracy to the audio. This allowed me to ‘re-live’ the interviews and immerse myself in the data. To analyze the data, I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2012) thematic analysis guide, beginning with phase one: immersion in the data. Braun and Clarke (2012) recommend reading and rereading any textual data gathered and listening to audio recordings to become intimately familiar with the data—at this point, the researcher will start to notice things relevant to their research question. As I listened to the transcripts and read through them, I made frequent notes in a separate file, documenting concepts that were occurring frequently in the interviews as well as my thoughts on how the concepts may connect. This smoothly transitioned into phase two: generating initial codes. While some codes were descriptive and stayed “close to content of the data and to the participants’ meaning” (e.g., Transit is Unsafe), others were more interpretive and reflected my own understanding of the participants’ meaning (e.g., Constrained Helping) (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 61).

As I coded, I was already thinking ahead to the patterns I repeatedly encountered in the data, yet the third phase of generating themes is only the *start* of the analysis process. There were multiple times when I thought an interesting concept would be vital to my study, only to be proven wrong once I coded later interviews. When I completed coding, one broad theme emerged in almost every interview, with multiple codes fitting within this theme. After a productive meeting with my supervisor, we split the single theme into two, which comprise my two findings chapters. This process constituted phase four: reviewing potential themes, where “developing themes are reviewed in relation to the coded data and entire data set” (p. 65). Phases



five and six—defining themes and producing the report, respectively—occurred simultaneously. The two themes had many moving parts, and I found that my writing process benefitted from being able to analyze and refine the themes as I wrote. As Braun and Clarke (2022) aptly put it: “analytic refinement involves writing” (p. 108).

Jerolmack and Khan (2014) posit that researchers can often fall prey to what they call *attitudinal fallacy*, the error of inferring behaviour patterns from verbal accounts—or in other words, participants may not *actually* do what they *say* they do. To mitigate drawing conclusions that may not be reflective of officers’ situated behaviour, I tried to supplement, corroborate, and triangulate interview data by attending two ride-alongs—one with a patrol TPO and the other with the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT), which consists of a TPO and outreach worker. While attending two ride-alongs does not allow for the kinds of rich observation that more extensive ethnographic observation would (Bucerius, 2021), it did allow me to witness firsthand some of the daily challenges described during interviews. I wrote memos immediately after each ride-along, documenting what was said and done from memory, noting things that I thought were particularly interesting in light of what I heard in interviews. These memos were then coded and analyzed according to the abovementioned steps.

### *Positionality*

Reflexivity can be an essential tool to improve the quality, rigor, and validity of research and increase understanding of research participants. According to Finlay (2012), a reflexive interviewer is critical of “the process, context, and outcomes of research and interrogates the construction of knowledge” (p. 317). My previous experiences with police and my own personal characteristics have—either consciously or unconsciously—impacted how this research project was developed and how the data were collected and analyzed. As such, it is important to situate

myself within this context and acknowledge how this project and my findings may have been impacted.

During my undergraduate degree in Criminology, I completed a four-month field placement with the Edmonton Police Service. This included shadowing members of the Community Crime Management Team (CCMT), touring social services in Edmonton's downtown core, and going for ride-alongs and walk-alongs with patrol and beat officers. During this placement, I had many informal conversations with police officers about the job and other subjects. I mentioned my placement experience when I contacted the EPS about entering into a research agreement, which I believe assuaged any potential concerns they may have had about my intentions behind this study.

Based on my prior experience with the EPS, it is impossible to say that I have initiated this study completely unbiased. However, I made every effort to let participants guide the interview to reduce my own biases. I frequently found myself probing for more information when they brought up an idea or concept I had not previously considered. Just as often, there were times I skipped ahead in the questionnaire because they had brought up something I already intended to ask them. While participants would sometimes bring up ideas or political viewpoints that I disagreed with, I am cognizant that this project is about how police and peace officers *themselves* perceive and experience policing transit—their opinions and perspectives form the basis of the research project, not my own. However, as Johnson & Rowlands (2012) posit, there is no single truth to be found from any one dataset; each researcher draws on their own knowledge to construct meaning from the data. As such, my resulting findings are only one interpretation of the collected data.

It is also important to note that I am a white, twenty-three-year-old woman who conducted interviews with predominantly white, older men as part of my Master's thesis. Since I was interviewing officers about their occupation, the interview took on the dynamic of a conversation between a teacher (the participant) and a student (the interviewer). I believe my status as a young female graduate student benefitted data collection, as I would often be able to play up the 'student' role, such as pretending not to know what something was so they would elaborate in their own words (Gurney, 1985). Research is inherently gendered, which is especially prominent when women conduct research in traditionally male-dominated fields (Beaulieu, 2023; Bucerius & Urbanik, 2019; Campeau, 2016; Chiswell & Wheeler, 2016; Horn, 1997; Urbanik & Bucerius, 2024). Throughout the interview process, I found myself gaining what Finlay (2012) calls a *methodological self-consciousness*, a facet of strategic reflexivity involving critical self-reflections on how to approach research. I was constantly aware of my own presentation when meeting participants, such as how I styled my hair, jewellery, and clothes—I wanted to seem approachable yet professional, but not *too* professional to the point where I no longer looked like a student. This is likely a gendered facet of research as well.

Almost all participants self-identified as Caucasian, and I believe if I was not also Caucasian, officer willingness to participate in my study and responses to my questions may have been different (Marks, 2004; Vera Sanchez & Portillos, 2021; Yankey, 2022). Many officers discussed public attitudes towards law enforcement becoming increasingly negative, often naming George Floyd's murder and the resulting Black Lives Matter movement as the driving force. It is possible that when faced with a researcher who was Black, Indigenous, or a person of colour, officers may have chosen to say nothing—it is also possible they might have felt a need to elaborate on their answer so as not to appear callous. It is equally possible that the officers

would have given the same answer to another researcher as they did to me. Additionally, some officers were very open when discussing their interactions with vulnerable persons on transit, many of which are Indigenous. Regarding the Indigenous homeless population in Edmonton, one officer claimed: “*I didn’t do that [referring to colonialism]. Maybe my ancestors had something to do with it. But what am I going to do about that?*” (Ben, TPO). It was said in a tone that invited commiseration from someone who could understand his position. Had I not been Caucasian, there is the possibility that Ben would have chosen different wording or tone, or not shared this sentiment with me at all. While race/ethnicity is a tricky subject to broach with police, I believe that being Caucasian allowed the topic of race to be a non-issue, one that could be discussed without fear of judgement, potentially assuaging officers’ concerns and encouraging candid conversation.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of research participants’ identities and responses is of utmost importance when conducting research (Stiles & Petrila, 2011). It is especially crucial in research involving police officers, who may be distrustful of the researcher’s intentions behind the collection of their demographic information and perspectives on sensitive topics (e.g., interactions with people experiencing homelessness) (Nix et al., 2019). As such, I took appropriate measures to inform officers of how their data would be stored, who would have access to it (myself and my supervisor), and the anonymization process their data would undergo before dissemination.

Prior to scheduling an interview, I provided prospective participants with an information sheet (see Appendix C) detailing what the interview would be about, that participation was voluntary, their ability to withdraw their information without penalty, steps I would take to

ensure confidentiality, as well as risks and advantages to taking part of the study. Before every interview, I would ask if they had any questions about the project or the interview process before we began. Most participants did not have any questions, but the few that did usually asked about what the research was for and its intentions, and/or wanted assurance that their responses would be anonymous. I believe my assurance of anonymity elicited more forthcoming and/or more honest responses. I utilized verbal consent forms (see Appendix D) so participants would not need to sign their names or record their participation, minimizing risks to them. This process ensured informed consent.

To further guarantee participants' confidentiality and privacy, all records (including transcripts, memos, field notes, etc.) are anonymized. All participant names are pseudonyms. In some instances, I have changed key characteristics to protect participants' identity. All interview data is stored on a personal password-protected laptop. Any physical copies of the data are kept in a locked desk drawer in my home office. This study received approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board in June 2022 (Pro00120686).

## Chapter Four: Transit Safety

With social disorder and safety concerns growing in Edmonton's public transit system, police officers and TPOs were increasingly called upon to govern and protect transit spaces. However, as I discuss throughout this chapter, officers did not believe this to be an easy task. They had to manage changing bylaws and enforcement capability, negative public scrutiny, and the perceived inability to enact proper consequences for people causing safety issues on transit. Using von Bertalanffy's (1950) systems theory, I explore how officers felt overwhelmingly unsupported by their respective organizations and the criminal justice system and, as a result, experienced profound powerlessness, hopelessness, and frustration over being unable to provide a safe transit experience.

### *'Lawlessness' On Transit*

As outlined in the Introduction, throughout 2022 and into 2023, local news media near-uniformly characterized Edmonton's transit system as dirty, dangerous, and bordering on unusable. Police and transit peace officers had differing perspectives on how law enforcement has been portrayed in Edmonton media, yet almost all participants agreed with the media's assertion that the transit system had rapidly declined in recent years. For example, one officer shared:

*It [safety/disorder issues] really is [are] a daily thing. I think over the last few years, more and more people are starting to realize that like, look, there's a serious issue here. Because some people—if they are a daily transit user—they are seeing issues every single day. Even if they're on transit for maybe 30 minutes of their day, [for] that 30 minutes, they might be surrounded by things that make them very uncomfortable. It's for sure a concern, like the level of violence we're seeing over the last few years, it feels like it's increasing. [...] Just people are a lot more on edge. The violence, the amount of weapons people are carrying on them, that's increased. (Samuel, TPO)*

Other officers stated that the downtown core’s deterioration was most striking to officers who had been away from frontline duty for a while. Indeed, returning to a situation after being away for some time can provide important insight into stark changes and/or comparisons between the past and present. Ben put it this way:

*The violence is just— (pause; sigh). It’s wild. We have officers that had been off longer term, like a couple of years due to injuries, and they come back and they’re like, “This is a different job entirely.” (Ben, TPO)*

Ben’s assertion that officers who were away returned to a “*different job*” was echoed by Jim, who was away from frontline police work in the downtown core for several years. After returning in 2022, he expressed disbelief at how drastically the milieu changed:

*When I came back after a few years, I couldn’t get over the level of crime. Like, it was a daily thing to have somebody stabbed significantly in the LRT. It was a daily thing to be pulling guns and shotguns and handguns off people that were on the LRT platform. The criminality, the open-air drug use from the people that are just—you know, fentanyl really knocks people out, and just the amount of people down there. Just lawlessness, really. (Jim, Police Officer)*

From officers’ perspectives, the purported increased presence of weapons, violence, and drug use significantly degraded safety on transit. According to them, safety has declined so dramatically over the past several years that they believe transit is unsafe for the public to use:

*Violence has been through the roof. We’ve had, like—I’ve had friends that have been assaulted this year. Like I’ve had people that have—from trying to punch you or spit on you, to try and pull knives on you, bear spray you. All kinds of ridiculous stuff happens. And like, more so—the scarier thing is, you kind of expect that going into our job. But it’s very, very common for the average citizen to be victimized of some variety on transit. Like, probably it’s one a day of some kind of variety of violent crime, whether that’s like—you’ll see a lot with people who have no fixed address. [...] Random violence is—I think that’s probably the scariest thing. It’s just like completely unprovoked. Just someone trying to get by a hallway that’s full of like, 30 people smoking meth. And if someone says something the wrong way, they’ll get at best punched out. At worse, like, threatened with a weapon or something to that capacity. (Patrick, TPO)*

Several officers vehemently stated they would not want their loved ones taking transit because they knew the risks of using it and did not want their family subjected to crime or violence:

*I wouldn't let my wife use the LRT system. And that's not because I think it's necessarily that she's going to get mugged; it's because I know she could be, right? And the fact that I'm saying that as a cop is pretty shitty, but it is what it is. (Ryan, Police Officer)*

*My daughter, I would never allow her to walk through transit, take the transit system downtown. Never. And that's real advice I would give her because you don't know what can happen. (David, Police Officer)*

*A lot of bad things happen on transit, Rachel. A lot of bad things. My wife says to me, "Hey, we're gonna go to Winspear for an event." I'm like, "Okay, what day? Because I'm driving you. And I'm gonna walk you to the door." (Theo, TPO)*

For context, the Winspear Centre is a concert hall that is easily accessible from the underground pedway connected to the Churchill LRT station. Rather than choosing the convenient and cost-effective transit option, Theo would rather drive his family downtown to ensure their safety. This sentiment was common among participants. For example, one TPO expressed that he would like to take transit, but felt he could not because of the increase in violence:

*Before, if we had someone bear spray someone, that was the talk of the office. Now like, anything happens on shift like, from bear sprays to guns. I'm hearing guns more than we heard bear spray back in the day. That's how common it is. Machetes. [...] I work for transit and I don't get on a train. My girlfriend doesn't get on a train and her sister doesn't get on a train. And I'd love to get on a train. I used to live downtown, and every time I needed to come in to work, I would drive from Government Centre to here and park \$18 a day rather than getting on a train. [...] There's been TPOs that were almost robbed after work going on a bus going home. (Damian, TPO)*

Officers' responses and reactions to the increased violence they were reporting extended beyond moral panic (Cohen, 1972). Rather than simply buying into popular public discourse about increased violence on transit, my participants saw and experienced this violence themselves and were genuinely fearful for not only their own safety, but that of their loved ones and the general public.



Police officers also revealed that they did not feel safe using Edmonton's transit system:

*Someone posted a guy smoking meth beside a kid on the bus, or the LRT [...]. I find the system is so broken right now. Like, I—honestly, I would never take the LRT right now. There is no way.* (Randall, Police Officer)

*I felt unsafe, myself [in the underground pedway]. I was in civilian attire, but like, I'm the only one here that's going somewhere [using the transit for 'appropriate' reasons]. Everyone else is [unhoused community members are] lined up, and they've got their stuff strewn everywhere and there's a guy yelling at the wall. I'm like "Ah! I don't feel safe here!"* (David, Police Officer)

*I wouldn't go to the transit centre unless I had a uniform on. [...] They're horrible places. They're scary. Like, I can understand the normal citizens having a fear of being there, because there's incidences all over, and assaults, and robberies, and just crime.* (Thomas, Police Officer)

Sierra-Arévalo (2021) attributes police officers' heightened awareness of potentially violent interactions with community members to the *danger imperative*, a policing vulnerability (Bartkowiak-Théron & Asquith, 2012) frame produced by police culture which "emphasizes violence and the need to provide for officer safety" (p. 71). When officers operate within this mindset, they "participate in and reproduce the cultural reality of work that can devolve into violence at any moment" (p. 76). Despite being highly skilled and well-trained, the police officers quoted above felt highly unsafe in Edmonton's transit system and did whatever they could to avoid using transit. This is a perplexing finding, especially considering the average of 18.5 years of experience between the three of them, including extensive work in EPS' Patrol, Beats, Disruption Unit, and High-Risk Encampment Teams.

David and Thomas mentioned the importance of the police uniform when entering transit spaces and highlighted how they felt unsafe without it. However, some officers characterized the transit system as dangerous even when they were uniformed:

*I wouldn't go out on the [transit] pedway, because if I'm by myself and I lose radio contact and I try to arrest somebody, it doesn't go very—well, it could go fine, but they*

*could have four friends around the corner. They could spray me with bear spray, then I'm really screwed.* (Ryan, Police Officer)

To Ryan, wearing the uniform was not enough to protect himself from potentially violent individuals intending to inflict harm. Despite acknowledging that the hypothetical interaction on the pedway could present no issues, he viewed the situation through the danger imperative and quickly devolved into an explanation of how the situation might end in bodily harm. Ryan's solution was to avoid walking through underground transit pedways alone while on patrol, a strategy that many transit passengers are likely unable to utilize. Indeed, despite the inability to do the same, one TPO admitted he regularly tells riders *not* to use transit:

*You get a lot from regular people too—they're like "Man, what's happening? It's not a safe place. Transit's not a safe place." And I'll just straight up say, "You're right. It's not. I recommend not using transit." I say that so often. And it's kind of wild. You know, I'm a transit peace officer, and I can't recommend to anybody to use transit, because I don't feel that it's safe.* (Wyatt, TPO)

When reflecting about safety on transit, officers were not only concerned with the safety of what they refer to as 'destination riders,' such as fare-paying citizens on their way to work or school. Officers were also keenly aware of and differentiated between the groups that often perpetrated violence against others and those that usually fall victim to this violence. As one police officer explained:

*There are people out there victims in those situations, but there are also predatory people that are down there. Like, it's—I think there's a misconception that it's all one type of group down there.* (Jim, Police Officer)

Damian further illuminated:

*There's vulnerable people who are homeless, and then there's people that prey on these homeless people. And we're talking about gang members and stuff like that. But sometimes they both get grouped in the same thing, because they're both homeless, or houseless, I should say. But, in reality, a lot of elders that are on the street, like seniors, they're also victimized by the same people that we're kicking out of stations that are*

*rocking gang colours, that are like involved in everything you see on the news, right? Often a lot of the homeless people or the houseless people, like the vulnerable community members that we're dealing with, they're also scared of the same people.* (Damian, TPO)

Many officers drew such distinctions during interviews, differentiating 'true' vulnerable people (such as unhoused people or people who use substances) from those who may also be unhoused, but were affiliated with gangs, carried weapons for the primary purpose of harming others<sup>3</sup>, and were willing/able to commit violence against the 'true' vulnerable population and general public. This is consistent with other studies conducted in Alberta, where researchers found that unhoused community members sometimes fear each other due to their gang involvement or their unpredictable behaviour from consuming potent drugs (Greene et al., 2023; Parsons, 2023). It is the latter group that officers felt the most powerless against in preserving their own safety and that of the public:

*[TPOs] have been career endingly hurt during lockups, like people lost fingers, there's people that have been knocked out cold and they're still off on concussions to this day, like it was years ago. [...] There are people that are within the population we deal with that fall under a lot of public scrutiny, but are also incredibly, incredibly violent people that have like, tons of conditions. Like, they're very, very prone to using weapons and they have no issue causing harm to us. So like, that's scary too, because it's like, do I want to end my career at 20-something [years old] over locking up a transit centre? Absolutely not.* (Patrick, TPO)

*A lot of the people that we were arresting had weapons on them. And that was pretty much a red flag for me going, "I'm dealing with these people, and I have baton and OC [pepper] spray." And then there was a few incidents with transit peace officers involving knives, and then I started to go, "Is it worth my safety at this point?"* (Cameron, Police Officer, former TPO)

*These are vulnerable people, we have to understand their circumstances and allow some of their behaviours because of mental health issues, past trauma, generational trauma, we have to be cognizant, and like aware of that, and be more respectful to that. I understand that. But it's also—well, then you have the citizens, your taxpaying citizens [housed community members] who want to use these things [transit] who are now*

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<sup>3</sup> I made this distinction as it is likely that many vulnerable people are carrying weapons for self-defence purposes (such as bear spray or knives), which some officers did acknowledge (e.g., "Everyone in the city centre core has a knife for protection, we understand that, understandably so." –Jim, Police Officer).

*becoming the victims of something that you are allowing to happen.* (Thomas, Police Officer)

Several officers like Thomas were cognizant that many people experiencing homelessness were likely dealing with significant trauma—including intergenerational trauma (see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015)—and/or untreated mental health conditions that led to their homelessness or developed because of it. However, officers were also conscious of the potential threat this group posed to the ‘true’ vulnerable population, the public, and themselves—a threat they felt could not effectively neutralize with their current tools and authoritative powers. As Charles succinctly explained:

*The violence that we’re facing on transit is crazy. And as a peace officer group, we’re not equipped to deal with it. We don’t have the training. We don’t have the weaponry. We don’t have the authority.* (Charles, High-Ranking City Employee)

Despite both organizations being responsible for ensuring safety on transit, the City (which is responsible for transit officers) and the EPS are two separate institutions with different mandates and goals. With these diverse actors and mandates come distinct challenges—consistent with the challenges TPOs face, Quinton described the difficulties police officers also encounter when providing safety on the transit system despite their increased training, weaponry, and authority:

*In reality, they [TPOs] have a different mandate than us [police officers]. You know, they’re there to make sure people pay their fare. Can they really like, stop a gunman in transit, though? No. That’s where we would come in. But they’re there right away, so they would be the first ones to see that happen, and then we’re playing catch up trying to find the gunman. So there’s always that disconnect.* (Quinton, Police Officer)

From the officers’ perspective, transit safety has declined over the past several years, evidenced by the increased presence of weapons and resulting violent altercations, as well as the proliferation of drug use in the stations. Participants shared it has become so dangerous that *both* police officers and TPOs reported feeling unsafe on transit property, especially in underground LRT stations. While police and TPOs differentiated between who was perpetrating violence and

who was often victimized within the vulnerable groups that frequented transit, both law enforcement groups still faced significant challenges in providing safety to the general public and those who were being victimized. I will explore these challenges in the following sections.

### *'We Had No Teeth'*

Police officers and TPOs listed several reasons as to why the transit system had become a more volatile environment, including but not limited to: increased drug use, more potent drug supply, a growing homeless population, and lack of police presence in 'problem areas'. While many of these are broader and concerning social issues that have and continue to proliferate in downtown Edmonton—especially post COVID-19—and bled into the transit system, certain COVID-19 aftereffects (such as reduced foot traffic in the stations, free transit fare, and stations being used as sanctioned shelter locations) are specific to transit spaces.

Notably, officers expressed frustrations with Edmonton's City Council, a group of elected councillors who make decisions impacting the bylaw authorities afforded to police officers and TPOs. In 2021, in response to media coverage on and public outcry about police officers and TPOs forcibly removing racial minorities from transit stations, City Council unanimously voted to repeal the 'Loitering' clause of Bylaw 8353 (Edmonton City Council, 2021). This decision eliminated officers' ability to remove anyone from transit property that was there longer than it would have taken to wait for a bus or train. Eleven months later, Council introduced Bylaw 19782, which added the 'Inappropriate Behaviour' clause (Riebe, 2022). This amendment allowed officers to remove individuals from transit property if they exhibited behaviour interfering with the comfort of transit passengers, as well as any behaviour that could cause

damage to transit property, such as visibly using a controlled substance (City of Edmonton, 2022b).

Officers spoke about the removal of the loitering clause, outlining three ways the change negatively affected their ability to provide safety on transit. They believed that they:

- 1) Could not remove safety threats from transit property.
- 2) Had their ‘lawful authority’ in transit spaces revoked.
- 3) No longer had the ability to patrol transit proactively.

Officers also discussed the implementation of the inappropriate behaviour clause and how little it rectified, blaming Council’s decisions for growing safety and disorder issues on transit.

Officers frequently brought up the ‘loitering bylaw’ and ‘inappropriate behaviour bylaw,’ often without prompting. While some police officers did discuss the removal of the loitering clause, it was overwhelmingly transit peace officers who discussed the change and felt the most disempowered by it:

*Our ability to engage people down there lawfully was almost pulled away. And members just—I don’t know if it was they were upset with how things were handled, and they just stopped doing it [policing transit]. (Jim, Police Officer)*

*They [the City] got rid of the loitering bylaw, so it’s no longer illegal for them to be hanging out there [in the transit stations]. We had no teeth. We couldn’t do anything with these people, so it was very frustrating. Then we were getting a lot of backlash from the paying customers being like, “Why aren’t you doing something about this? Why aren’t you kicking these people out?” I go, “I can’t.” “What do you mean, you can’t?” I said, “I have no authority to kick these people out just because they’re there in the station hanging out. I don’t have a bylaw or a provincial offense that I can go speak to them.” [...] Whenever the City removed the loitering bylaw was when this really started to kick off. Yeah, the City encouraged people to be in the train stations and inadvertently caused this mess for sure. (Gregory, TPO)*

Gregory’s statement highlights the extent to which the bylaw removal affected TPOs’ perceptions of what they could and could not do; without the loitering clause, TPOs felt like they did not

have the lawful authority to even *speak* to certain individuals on transit let alone remove them from transit property. This nuance is especially salient considering the current social events at the time, such as the heightened public criticism and outrage against law enforcement after police officers murdered George Floyd (Reny & Newman, 2021; The New York Times, 2020).

Participants—EPS officers and TPOs—spoke about how the removal of the loitering clause essentially *also* removed their ability to be lawfully placed in the transit system. Without the assurance of their legal authority in transit spaces, they believed they could be subject to negative repercussions, such as termination of their employment or contempt from the public:

*Before, there was a loitering bylaw. For some stupid reason the City got rid of that, which is dumb, because I need to legally, like lawfully be placed to talk to people. If somebody's just walking by, and I know that they're probably doing something wrong, I can't talk to him. I mean, if I ended up getting in a fight with him, I could get, you know, lose my job or whatever, right? So they gotta be doing something that I can talk to them for. (Bill, TPO)*

*When we [police officers] go in [to the transit station], we have no protection legally. So I stop somebody, now I'm being called a racist. (Ryan, Police Officer)*

Managing the public's perception of law enforcement was a major component of officers' concern about the need to be lawfully placed on transit property. They were hyperaware of how their interactions with marginalized and/or racialized members of the public could be misconstrued as racial profiling and become front page news, jeopardizing the reputation of both the officer and their respective law enforcement organization. This is consistent with research conducted by Newell (2019), who found police officers' primary worry regarding "bystander video stem[s] from fears about visibility and exposure, the misrepresentation or misinterpretation of their conduct, and physical interference with their daily work" (p. 71). Bradford and Quinton (2014) also established that perceptions and experiences of public support (or lack thereof) affected police officers' conceptions of their own authority and self-legitimacy. To navigate that

pressure while working in transit spaces, one participant explained to me that the ability to clarify why he is dealing with someone is an effective tool when interacting with concerned citizens: *“I always say like, I just need to be prepared to articulate myself and have that conversation”* (Francis, Police Officer). Without the loitering clause, however, officers no longer had a bylaw they could use to articulate their actions to the public. They felt hung out to dry with no legal protection when trying to engage potentially or highly problematic individuals on transit property, which they believed further damaged the public’s perception of law enforcement.

Additionally, as Oliver pointed out, focusing on the need to be lawfully placed in transit spaces can hinder how officers interact in the transit system, thus creating an even larger safety issue:

*The biggest challenge, I think, is not being able to fully enforce what we need to do. We always have to think, and we have to do mental gymnastics to get to a part where we can feel comfortable and lawfully placed as a peace officer. It’s always mental gymnastics. Always. Like, oh, do I have this? Do I have this? Do I have this? Do I have this? [...] Now, mind you, that’s a good thing, because it puts us in check. But it also does create safety issues, because now you’re not necessarily thinking about safety. Now you’re thinking about, “Oh my goodness, am I lawfully placed here?”* (Oliver, TPO)

Vincent and Wyatt further explained why the removal of the loitering clause affected how transit peace officers could successfully do their job:

*Taking away loitering has definitely taken some teeth away in regards to our ability to effectively keep stations clear, because now we have to wait for them to commit another offence.* (Vincent, TPO)

*It was really a useful tool because we could be proactive. So we could go out and when we’re doing proactive patrols, we see people loitering, we’d move them along the way before they had time to camp out, before they had time to lay out all of their belongings, their sleeping bags, and their shopping carts, and their personal belongings and all their bags and set up.* (Wyatt, TPO)

The problem of not being able to be proactive in the stations, as Wyatt and Alicia explained, is that loitering can lead to greater issues:



*Somebody's in an area. It's okay, it's fine if he's just in the area. Okay, but now what's gonna happen? There's another person that's gonna be attracted, now the pipes come out, and now more people—"All right, you've got drugs there, we'll go hang out." And then now gang members come in wearing their red. And like, there's lots of problems that happen when you allow people to be stagnant in stations. (Wyatt, TPO)*

*I've had one coworker kind of give me shit for talking to someone who was literally just sitting there not doing anything wrong. And like, I get that. However, you get that person sitting there doing nothing wrong. Next thing you know, their friend comes up and they start sitting with them. And then another friend comes and the next thing you know, you've got like 10 people there. And now everyone's doing drugs, and then their shit's everywhere. And I'd like to think yeah, people could just sit there quietly and nothing—but no. (Alicia, TPO)*

Another participant provided additional insight:

*You don't want to cause harm to people and kick them out into the cold and things like that. But then you also don't want what seems like minor disorder behavior to escalate into more major disorder behavior, and then into like—someone getting victimized is a crime too, right? So it's kind of like, you'd utilize these bylaws to make sure people were following the rules while they're in that space, so people would feel safe. (Henry, Police Officer)*

From July 2021 to June 2022, officers did not have the power to enforce the loitering clause nor the inappropriate behaviour clause. As Henry stated, officers used to be able to enforce proper behaviour by utilizing the bylaws, thus promoting feelings of safety in transit spaces. Without the loitering clause, officers felt powerless in their ability to provide safety and comfort on transit. However, even when the inappropriate behaviour clause was implemented, *seemingly* restoring officers' power to remove people from the station, many officers—especially TPOs—felt that the new clause did not re-instate the authorities they had before the loitering clause was removed:

*Inappropriate behavior, it's almost a lie. Well, not almost. It is a straight up lie. What the City Council says they're using it for versus what it's actually used for isn't true. It's like, "We can't have people hanging out on transit and doing things that they're not supposed to do." Completely untrue. [...] The bylaw says no one may use transit for any purpose*

*other than using transit. The first thing we have is we got an email saying, “Sheltering on transit is considered a viable use of transit,” so like, it was all lip service. It was no actual change towards anything. [...] It’s like, you passed a bylaw and you just basically lied about what it is. What have you accomplished? Actually making transit safer? Absolutely nothing is the answer. (Patrick, TPO)*

*They [the City] gave us [the] inappropriate behavior [bylaw]. So that in itself created another dilemma, because now (sighs) if they’re just laying in the corner to sleep, leave them alone, they’re not bothering anybody—that was the idea. “Just leave them alone. They’re not bothering—” “Okay. Sure. We’ll do that.” Again, broken windows—one person leads to another person. Walk by, they’re fine. Two minutes later, you leave. They’re smoking. They’re overdosing. Oh my gosh, and it just became unending. (Theo, TPO)*

The inappropriate behaviour clause also did not rectify officers’ difficulties in feeling lawfully placed:

*So inappropriate behavior, we have to articulate why it’s inappropriate. So a bunch of people just laying on benches, could or could not be considered inappropriate behavior, right? So like, we need more than that. So when the public calls in and complains, and we get dispatched—so not only they complain, but we also get dispatched to go and deal with this. It’s like, okay, well, what do you want us to deal with? Do you want us just check to see that they’re alive? Because sometimes that’s basically what we have grounds for, without having to like, articulate, articulate, articulate, stretch, and try to make it work, right? So yeah, that part’s frustrating. (Wyatt, TPO)*

As a result of the City’s seemingly poor choices regarding transit bylaws, police and peace officers felt they did not have the appropriate authority or tools to provide safety on transit. As such, many officers expressed overwhelming frustration with the municipal government’s approach (or lack thereof) in dealing with the issues they were tasked to—but could not necessarily effectively—police. They held the perception that the City was simply letting transit stations, buses, and LRTs continue to decline rather than meaningfully utilizing officers to give patrons a sense of safety:

*I think they [the City] refuse[s] to acknowledge what’s actually going on on the transit system. Like the fact that they keep blatantly lying, saying, “Transit’s safe, we want it to be a delightful time,” you know, blah, blah. It’s like, when I’m on the internet and I see that no one likes transit, it’s unsafe, you got to open your eyes and see it’s dangerous for*

*your employees, and it's dangerous to your citizens. But I feel like they're just in denial. Kind of how it seems, anyways. (Alicia, TPO)*

*I think our City Council is just hoping that it goes away. When these things pop up, it's like, "Well, it's no big deal. And we're doing this, we're—" They'll throw their fluff on it in saying what they are doing, which isn't changing much, and just hope it goes away. [...] I just I think the City's embarrassed by what they've done is not working, and they don't want to admit what they've done has not worked. So, they're like, "Well, that's just an isolated incident, and what we're doing is going to work. Trust us." Right? Trust your government (laughs sarcastically). (Thomas, Police Officer)*

*It seems to me like they [City officials] are actively saying they [the transit stations] are safe when they're not. Because otherwise, they would have done something if they believed that they were unsafe (pause). At least one would hope. (Quinton, Police Officer)*

Almost every officer I interviewed expressed how little faith they had in the City to resolve the issues they believed the City itself caused. This sentiment was especially prevalent among TPOs, as they felt beholden to City directives in a way EPS members did not. Officers did not feel heard by the City, yet still felt obligated to follow their commands despite the belief that City's directives would not meaningfully improve transit safety or the lives of vulnerable community members:

*Nobody asks us! Nobody talks to us. Nobody asks us like, what's your perspective? They [the City] just tell[s] us what to do and we go, "Okay. Yes, sir." We don't get the opportunity to be like, "That's probably not going to work." And so we'll begrudgingly do something that we've been directed to do for six months, and then they go, "Well how come this isn't working?" Well, because you didn't ask us if it was gonna work or not, you dummies. Could have told you within the first 30 seconds, that's a stupid idea. Would've given you 15 reasons why. You would have been like, "Oh, okay, that makes sense. Maybe we should relook at this." But instead, they just tell us what to do. And they just expect it to work, and when it doesn't work, we're the ones that get shit on for not making it work. (Gregory, TPO)*

*I've talked to city councillors about this [encampment 'clean-ups'] in the past—it puts everybody in a terrible position. [...] What are we doing at the end of the day? We're displacing someone for maybe a few minutes or a few hours, we're taking all their celestial possessions. It may not be important to your eye, but a shopping cart filled with X, Y, and Z might be important to them. [...] It doesn't work well at all. It makes the City look like shit, and it makes us look like shit. (Colin, Police Officer)*

Officers believed that some City’s directives, such as displacing individuals from encampments like Colin mentioned, would not solve underlying issues associated with homelessness (Beaulieu, 2023; Urbanik et al. 2023). Rather, it would push individuals out of an established community space and force them to find shelter elsewhere, such as in transit centres, stations, and pedways. Efforts such as this by law enforcement actors have been argued to deter crime and social disorder as well as improve marginalized people’s quality of life by encouraging them to find housing options and access social services (Johnsen et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2010; Katz et al., 2001). Several researchers, however, have criticized this notion, instead determining that ‘anti-homeless’ legislation and practices have increased social inequality and made the lives of people experiencing homelessness more difficult (Manning, 2010; Robinson, 2019; Stuart, 2014a, 2014b).

Gregory and Colin, among many other police officers and TPOs, expressed frustration with the City when they were directed to act in a way they thought was neither effective in improving community safety nor beneficial to the lives of marginalized persons. When officers—especially senior officers—disagree with decisions made by upper management or no longer feel like they can make a difference, they do not feel valued by their organization and are more likely to leave the profession (Charman & Bennett, 2022; Lynch & Tuckey, 2008; Parsons et al., 2011). Police officer retention and strength has been steadily dropping in several jurisdictions, including the UK, the United States, and Canada (Home Office, 2020; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2023), similarly evidenced by the difficulty the EPS and City of Edmonton are experiencing in hiring new police and peace officers (Male, 2023; Riebe, 2023b). By their own accounts, police officers and TPOs were struggling with the impacts of understaffing, which may have severe implications on crime and community safety in

Edmonton (Mello, 2019) and could further increase strain on law enforcement actors to provide effective safety measures.

When the City removed the loitering clause from one of its key bylaws, police and TPOs faced three distinct challenges. Not only did they feel they could not provide safety because they could not remove individuals they deemed a threat from transit property, but they also did not feel lawfully placed on the transit system, which affected their ability to patrol proactively and further presented safety issues for the public and themselves. When the bylaw was amended with the inappropriate behaviour clause, officers—especially TPOs—believed it did little to mitigate the challenges they were experiencing while policing transit, further degrading the officers’ confidence in their governing body. The impact of how officers experienced and dealt with these challenges will be further explored in the next section.

### *No Enforcement, No Consequences*

While transit peace officers were dealing with the ramifications of the City changing their bylaw authorities, the Edmonton Police Service was dealing with similar aftereffects of intense scrutiny in the media. A few months prior to the loitering clause removal, EPS came under fire for escorting members of the vulnerable community out of an underground transit station in thirty-below weather. The incident was captured on video, posted to Facebook, and widely shared by news outlets and across social media. The video sparked outrage against EPS, with commenters on the original post calling the police officers’ actions “disgraceful,” “shameful,” “disgusting,” and “heartbreaking” (Bear Claw Beaver Hills House, 2021). While the police officers pointed these individuals in the direction of proper sheltering locations, an EPS spokesperson stated that they “should have done a better job” at connecting citizens to the

available social services and agencies (Jeffrey, 2021). Many police officers brought this incident up when discussing the challenges of policing transit and the LRT, often discussing how public backlash related to the incident and the resulting negative perceptions of police contributed to police officers' reluctance to enforce certain behaviour on the system. One participant admitted:

*I know a lot of people, especially when all that media stuff came down, police are hesitant to go down [into the LRT] and deal with people. It's all—I mean, I can't tell you stats if there was less cops in the LRT stations after that. But I can tell you that there was a huge backlash where now police are like, "Well, it doesn't matter how much good we do, or what we're doing, we're still getting shit on," for lack of a better word. So, your willingness to go down and put yourself in that situation was a little bit less than maybe it used to be. (Randall, Police Officer)*

Even though officers understood how dangerous the transit system had become and knew their presence was necessary to improve safety, they viewed transit as an inherently risky space to police. While the increased violence on transit was of concern to almost every officer I interviewed, it was not the threat of physical harm that made them reluctant to “put [themselves] in that situation.” Rather, it was the risk of being filmed and misrepresented in the media that fuelled their hesitation to police transit (Newell, 2019). Not only that, but after the media incident in 2021, police officers felt they would not be supported by EPS if their actions spurred more public backlash. For example, Quinton revealed his disappointment with how EPS handled the media incident and cited this as his reason for why he and other officers no longer wanted to enforce proper behaviour on transit:

*They're [EPS is] like, "We can do better," and it's like no, no, no, no. Why didn't you say in the media that our members were supposed to do this because this is what Council has set up? It's like they didn't want to get involved in the messy game of the politics that the media was portraying, so they just backpedalled and threw their own members under the bus. So, what that created—I don't know if you've heard of this one—no one wants to police the LRT system, because that is one of many incidences where Council and our own chain of command does not back police for doing their job. It is literally the train, no one wants to be near it. I can go down there and spend an entire day and I could do a lot of good work. But my chances of getting into a fight are so high and then becoming a*

*YouTube sensation and it being misrepresented makes me not want to go down there.*  
(Quinton, Police Officer)

Jim further explained how officers did not feel supported by their own organization and how the resulting lack of enforcement/presence in the stations likely contributed to the decline in the transit system:

*If you don't feel supported internally, I think it's very dangerous [because] they're [police officers are] gonna pull back. Like that's why I think the LRT—people [officers] stopped enforcing down there because they didn't feel they were gonna get support. So, they just said, "Well, we're not doing it then." And then look what happened, right?* (Jim, Police Officer)

In addition, peace officers were also dealing with opposition from the public, exacerbated by the incident with the police. Indeed, when police services are subject to heavy criticism in the media, it is not only the perpetrating police service that faces backlash—many other law enforcement agencies can be affected (Silverstein, 2021; Zaru & Simpson, 2020). From the TPOs' perspective, it also impacted how City Council directed them, since in the officers' view, Council is inclined to make decisions based on current public opinion. Ben expressed that during this time, he felt caught between varying authorities who all had different ideas on how to enforce proper behaviour on transit:

*You have three different factions, some of which are in the same organization, that are saying very different things about the same problem. Council tells me to do one thing. Technically, they're still my boss. The mayor wants me to do this. My manager says, "Don't do this." My other supervisor says, "Yeah, sure, fine, whatever, I don't care." EPS is like, "Ah, we don't know what's happening." So that's the most challenging part currently, is being stuck in the middle of that.* (Ben, TPO)

Oliver and Ben further explained how TPOs' ability to enforce bylaws was not a static expectation—rather, it was a dynamic power that was afforded to them seemingly at the whim of management/the City:

*We're just trying to keep up with like, different narratives by 'both sides of the political spectrum' but like, we're just trying to keep up with what's being told to us. Because some*

*days: “Hammer them!” Next day is, “Don’t bother touching anybody!” It’s kind of like going with the flow. (Oliver, TPO)*

*When COVID happened, they [the City] made transit free. Management had no idea what the hell was going on, they changed the bus routes and the frequency of all this stuff. And we were told not to enforce anything, basically. We didn’t enforce anything! (Ben, TPO)*

To illustrate, when the City collaborated with Edmonton Transit to open transit centres as a temporary shelter option for the homeless population during extreme weather conditions, officers believed this decision influenced how marginalized groups viewed transit stations, thus making their ability to enforce proper behaviour on transit even more difficult:

*I think the City may have made a mistake when they said, “Let’s use the transit systems as shelters.” Maybe they didn’t have another option or no other resources at the time, but I think that ultimately, that created an opportunity for social disorder to move into the transit systems even more than it was already there and grow. Now folks that are there don’t want to leave. And they don’t want to go to a shelter, and they don’t want to go anywhere else. They want to stay there, but they can’t. And so then you’ve got that bit of a fight trying to get them out. Not physical, but just sort of social, “Hey, buddy, you gotta move, gotta move, gotta move,” because normal folks want to feel safe when they’re walking through those halls. (David, Police Officer)*

*They were [the City was] opening up the stations and LRT stations for when it was really cold. Like a year ago, couple years ago, they would open it up. And it was like, okay, on the surface, this looks really great, right? People were like, “Oh, this is so nice. They’re gonna have a place to get out of the cold and this we should be doing more of, not having peace officers kick them out,” and all this stuff. And the reason why they opened it is to relieve some of the overfilling of the shelters, right? But meanwhile, the shelters were now becoming unused, because they get searched at the shelters, they have to hand in their beers, they have to hand in their personal belongings, and all that kind of stuff. But we weren’t searching people because we’re not allowed to search people coming into the stations. They get wind that, “Oh, man, things are really good over at the LRT,” so they go to the LRT. And they’re—not allowed, but they do their drinking, and they do their smoking because it’s not constant supervision. Nobody takes their stuff, so it’s a better environment for them. So, we’re creating a better environment for crime to happen on transit, rather than pushing it the other way. (Wyatt, TPO)*

Like Wyatt described, there are several reasons why people experiencing homelessness may not wish to utilize shelter services, including fear of robbery, stigma, verbal/physical/sexual violence, law enforcement presence, as well as stringent shelter rules (e.g., hours of operation,



separation from partners/pets, the shelter's religious affiliations, etc.) (Keynan et al., n.d.; Donley & Wright, 2012; Herring, 2021; Kim, 2020; Larsen et al., 2004; Paat et al., 2021). Due to limited shelter capacity, fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus, and lack of information available to people experiencing homelessness, accessing shelters was also an increased challenge during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (Crouzet et al., 2022; de Paula et al., 2020). Recent research from Edmonton demonstrates how all these reasons limited people's shelter access (Urbanik et al., n.d.). Since the City of Edmonton allowed unsheltered individuals to use transit spaces one winter in the absence of available shelter beds, many officers perceived that people experiencing homelessness quickly understood they were no longer receiving tickets for loitering, which may have indicated to them that sheltering on transit property was "*a better environment*" than designated shelters. One TPO illuminated his belief on how these factors interacted to increase the resistance vulnerable people displayed when given orders to move along:

*We used to be able to go into a station and there'd be people hanging out, and they knew that we were coming to deal with them, and they were most likely going to get a ticket for loitering. [...] They'd see us coming and go, "We're leaving," and then they'd take off. But as the City changed its stance on where people can stay when it's cold outside or when the weather is inclement, the people that we were interacting with started to understand that that was changing. And they'd go, "Oh, well now I'm not getting kicked out for just being here. So now I can be here." (Gregory, TPO)*

At the same time, the City and the EPS Police Chief directed TPOs and police, respectively, to stop ticketing certain individuals in the station, not only removing a portion of their enforcement power but also *disempowering* them to enforce more broadly:

*They [the City] started changing things, like they started sending out emails saying that we're not supposed to ticket homeless people for fare evasion. And that was crazy. Like, that totally flipped everything upside down for us. Because like, so you want us to continue to write tickets for other people, but when we see a homeless person who's also breaking the law in the exact same way that these other people are breaking the law, we're not supposed to write them a ticket? [...] So, there's a lot of officers that are like,*

*“That is crazy, I’m just not going to write fare evasion tickets at all anymore.” (Wyatt, TPO)*

*Our Chief and our, you know, executive level has recognized that we can’t cite or give tickets to drug users to solve their problems. We can’t imprison drug addicts because that’s not going to solve their problem. (Ryan, Police Officer)*

As Ryan alluded to, EPS Chief McFee has long been vocal about his assertion that police officers cannot arrest their way out of homelessness and the opioid crisis (Huddart, 2017; Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 2022). In an Alberta study on SCS access, Urbanik and colleagues (2022) examined how unhoused people and people who use drugs perceive and experience interactions with Edmonton police officers. The consensus among participants was that police officers were focusing their efforts on large-scale drug trafficking rather than charging individuals for carrying personal amounts of drugs or for consuming drugs in public spaces. One participant from this study even echoed Ryan’s account by saying: “You don’t see too many guys getting busted. [...] The new police chief here apparently is not about putting people in jail, he’s about fixing their problems. Whatever their addictions are, or whatever” (Urbanik et al., 2022, p. 6). This study also found that police officers in Edmonton could also facilitate and encourage safer drug use practices (Urbanik et al. 2022).

Chief McFee’s messaging has clearly made its way to the unhoused population, including people who use drugs. While the position to reduce drug enforcement may have benefits for the vulnerable community, such as decreased police harassment, less risk of rushed/dangerous drug consumption, and increased uptake of SCS services (Collins et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2005, Greene et al., 2022; McNeil et al., 2014; Urbanik et al., 2022), it severely limited what police and peace officers could do to keep transit stations clear. With police officers not feeling supported internally by EPS and their resulting lack of presence/enforcement in transit stations, combined

with the City's decision to open transit as a *de facto* shelter and direct TPOs to stop ticketing marginalized groups, neither police nor peace officers felt supported to enforce appropriate behaviour on the transit system. This further contributed to the degradation of safety in transit stations, because, as a result, they were unable to enact meaningful *consequences* for people causing safety and disorder issues. Damian and Alicia illuminated:

*They said if they didn't have a house, we were not allowed to give out tickets. There was no enforcement, so there was no consequences. So, if someone was harassing someone, all they had to say was say, "Hey, I'm homeless." Because there was no consequences, right? Just like, for two years. (Damian, TPO)*

*All of a sudden, we're being told, "Don't issue fines," so we're not doing that anymore. And then there's no consequences for actions, and it's just spiraled. (Alicia, TPO)*

Despite their frustrations over being told not to issue tickets to the vulnerable population, TPOs admitted that they felt writing tickets no longer provided meaningful consequences anyway, as their efforts were not met with support from the broader criminal justice system:

*The problem is there's no consequence for what they're doing. Like you write a ticket to somebody, and it'll get quashed by the Crown, because it's like, well, they're homeless, or, you know, they have this or that. It's like, well, what are we supposed to do? (Bill, TPO)*

*For a while, they [vulnerable people] saw us and they didn't care. They're like, "What are you gonna do? Are you gonna arrest me?" Maybe. Probably not. Am I gonna give you a ticket? Maybe, but like, are you gonna pay it? No. Are you gonna go to jail because you didn't pay it? No. So it's like, what consequence is there? (Liam, TPO)*

*I guess that's the challenge—what do you do? Tickets don't do anything. We write people tickets because—I don't even know why. I don't even know why we write people tickets. It doesn't make sense. These tickets don't go anywhere. [...] From my understanding, these tickets don't even make it to court most of the time. [...] I just hear rumors of some police sergeant who said, "If you think your trespass tickets are going anywhere, you're fucked." You know, they're not even really pursuing criminal charges that intensely anymore is what it seems like, because the police are tired and don't lay charges because they don't go anywhere. So, it's kind of the same for us, we write these people tickets. What happens to the tickets? No idea. (Brett, TPO)*

Brett believed that police officers were not laying charges on vulnerable people—in a sense, he was correct. Two participants explained how Edmonton police officers are not currently charging anyone found with personal amounts of drugs on them:

*The courts in Alberta don't even really punish drug users, to be frank, for purely drug use. So it's not really worth the time to charge somebody for possessing drugs. Trafficking is a different story. Just using is—there's enough studies, even if the law hasn't caught up with it. I've never charged somebody for possessing fentanyl or meth without it being for trafficking. (Ryan, Police Officer)*

*We've lost our four-one possession charge in terms of any kind of simple drug possession. So we can arrest, but we're not going to charge. And at the same time, jail is not an opportunity for these folks to—and they're not going to even see jail time on that. Issuing tickets for these things, these offenses are not going to pay it. So we just keep spiralling down. And if some sort of intervention isn't made at some point, we're just gonna go over the curve we're gonna start tipping and tipping and tipping. (Colin, Police Officer)*

Indeed, to reduce drug poisoning and fatal overdoses, Edmonton's Community and Public Services committee voted unanimously to develop a decriminalization strategy to lobby the federal government for an exemption (Amato, 2022b). While this is not a formal policy for police officers, they have been practicing leniency and non-intervention during interactions with people who use drugs (e.g., not charging for public drug use, not confiscating personal amounts of drugs) for several years (Urbanik et al., 2022). However, the Calgary Police Chief, speaking on behalf of Alberta Police Chiefs, warned against making the change without additional support from social and harm reduction services, fearing it would only lead to increased social disorder and thus create more work for law enforcement officers (Smith, 2023).

From participants' perspective, the Chief's fears have been realized. Officers spoke candidly about how they believed the removal of any consequences for using illicit drugs in public spaces—such as the unofficial decriminalization of personal amounts of drugs—

contributed to the widespread perception among vulnerable people that open drug use on transit was now acceptable:

*If you have enough [drugs] on you that would be considered personal use, you're not getting charged with drug offenses anymore so there's no consequences that way. And the users have figured that out, to the point where they're just now openly using narcotics wherever they are. [...] I remember this pretty vividly; a couple of years ago, my partner and I went into Central LRT [station], and there's a guy right in front of us. He looks at us while he's smoking from his glass pipe, and my partner goes, "Could you maybe put that away and get out?" And he goes, "Why?" So (scoffs) like, it's just like, what are you supposed to say to that? I was flabbergasted. I'm like, "Because you can't smoke drugs in an LRT station, get the fuck out." (Gregory, TPO)*

*I've seen needles in arms, spoons being lit right on the train, sitting right beside kids, all the time. It is all the time. And their number one excuse is that they thought it was legal. It's this cycle that has been created. So they'll go, they'll get high, they'll trip out, and they might attack someone, or they'll hurt themselves, or they'll cause a scene. (Quinton, Police Officer)*

Oliver offered a more nuanced perspective, expressing empathy for vulnerable people, yet simultaneously further illuminating potential safety concerns of open drug use on transit:

*Some people [are] like, "Well, where are they gonna use? Where are they supposed to use? Why is it wrong?" It's like, yes, I understand. But [...] it's not the act of them doing it, it's the repercussions of them doing it. So it's how it affects them. Because people typically when they get assaulted just randomly by somebody, it's because that person is under the influence of drugs, and they're having some kind of episode [e.g., psychosis]. (Oliver, TPO)*

For many officers, the lack of consequences for drug use on transit presented a real safety concern. Not only were people consuming drugs in confined spaces and forcing other transit passengers to breathe second-hand vapours and/or smoke, but officers were also concerned about the effects of the drugs on the user themselves, and how they might be triggered to commit (often unprovoked) violence against others. Without the ability to charge people for personal drug use, both police officers and TPOs felt unable to provide any consequences and thus also felt powerless to provide a sense of safety to transit passengers.

It is important to note that both police and peace officers were not unsympathetic when speaking about vulnerable people who use drugs. Almost all of them acknowledged and understood that many of them—if not all—likely had some form of trauma that underpinned their substance misuse. However, officers were caught in a difficult position where they had to balance moral obligations with their economic obligation (Loader & White, 2018), essentially *forced to choose between* compassion and their law enforcement duties. They also could not use their enforcement capabilities to provide ‘coercive care’ (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2010) or practice what Stuart (2016) dubbed ‘therapeutic policing,’ where police use their enforcement powers to incentivize vulnerable persons to self-reform. While more punitive tactics towards marginalized persons in efforts to improve their lives are argued to be ineffective (Beckerman & Fontana, 2019; Huang et al., 2011; Stuart, 2014a, 2016), without enforcement powers and the ability to provide people with consequences for inappropriate and/or dangerous behaviour, officers felt they could do little else than merely (and temporarily) displace marginalized persons from transit spaces. I will further examine officers’ perspectives on displacement as a tactic in dealing with marginalized populations in Chapter Five.

However, it was not only people who use drugs who officers felt were escaping proper consequences for their behaviour and creating a safety issue on the transit system. In the officers’ view, there were no proper consequences they could give to *anyone* who committed crimes on transit, including those involved in high-level organized criminal activity:

*The vulnerable people know, “Oh, this cop’s gonna bug me for half an hour, he’s gonna slip me a useless piece of paper that I’m just going to ignore. And in six weeks, I’ll have to deal with it again when a cop runs my name and gives me another piece of paper. Eventually maybe I’ll have to go to jail, I’ll see the Justice of the Peace. And then he’ll let me out.” But then there’s no consequences for that.* (Thomas, Police Officer)

*We [police and peace officers] can finish a blitz and like, nobody's gone to jail. You know, we've executed 25 warrants. That sounds really impressive until you realize that every single one of them walked away with a long sheet of paper in their backpack and got to carry on with their day. (Ian, TPO)*

Furthermore, even when people were arrested, charged, and sent to jail (usually for violent offences), officers felt frustration that the criminal justice system did not provide any meaningful safety improvements on transit:

*You can go bear spray a random person, you can go and bear spray a whole train full of people, and probably kick a baby. And, yeah, you get arrested, certainly, you get charged with a whole bunch of stuff. But if you meet certain conditions, you'll be out in under a week. Like, probably even before that. [...] They'll like, straight up laugh in the face of it. Like, "Okay, you got me, haha, I'll see you in a day." They know that there are no consequences to anything they do. (Patrick, TPO)*

*Basically, people that are released with clear intentions to reoffend, they're given nowhere else to go, no access to proper resources. The resources they're given, they don't want to take—and they're not forced to take those resources. They go to transit. And then they'll attack people, or attack each other, or hurt themselves, which causes a safety issue. That's the number one thing that I see, [...] it's just being released. And that's where they go. It happens all the time, and that is a problem. (Quinton, Police Officer)*

*We have a revolving door justice system where people are not held accountable. And I don't know, if someone needs help, help them. But like, how does it make sense if we let someone out [of custody] and a random person going to school or work is getting victimized? Like, that doesn't make you feel right when you come into work. Because, so to speak, this is our house, and we can't keep the guests safe. (Damian, TPO)*

At every step of the criminal justice process—charging, arresting, holding, sentencing, and/or incarceration—officers felt like they were being let down and that their efforts to keep transit safe were futile. Indeed, the overwhelming need for police officer and TPO presence on transit “indicates that other means of control have failed” and that the “symbolic aspects of the wider institutions of law itself are failing” (Ericson, 1982, p. 11). Such conceptions from police and TPOs contradicts Shmatko’s (2023) participants’ conceptions of idyllic Western policing and the belief that Canadian police do not have to deal with frustrations such as lack of authority, public

respect, funding, as well as gaps in infrastructure. While officers did not discuss needing to fix their own police vehicles or wear old/worn out uniforms as Ukrainian police officers did (Shmatko, 2023), they similarly felt like their governing body and surrounding system infrastructure did not provide sufficient trust in or support to officers to carry out their policing duties accurately and effectively.

Transit peace officers were especially frustrated and annoyed with the failures of the broader criminal justice system. Without the system's role of providing consequences for people causing safety concerns on transit, officers were left dealing with the compounded "*trickle off effects*" of police officers' inability to intervene, waiting for the cycle to begin again:

*I think police are doing the best that they can with what they can do, right? Like they're trying to deal with like, you know, like the big drug situations, the gang situations, the weapons. But again, if you take it to the courts and the courts don't really do anything about it, well, their work's kind of wasted. So, then we're obviously getting like the trickle off effects of the drugs, the violence, the gangs, the weapons, which we can't really do much about other than arrest them and hold them for police to come kind of seize that stuff. (Alicia, TPO)*

Under von Bertalanffy's (1968) systems theory, it is important to consider all elements of a system and their relationships with each other. Causal relationships are more likely to be circular since effects may act upon the causes retroactively through feedback loops, which can reinforce existing processes. As Alicia described, police attempted to manage the "*big drug situations, the gang situations, the weapons*" and brought evidence to courts, but when the courts did not "*do anything about it,*" those that the police officers arrested returned to the transit system, and the cycle began once more. The same circular reasoning can be applied to officers' perceived inability to enforce proper behaviour on transit. Participants believed that negative public scrutiny spurred City Council to revoke the loitering clause, but without the lawful authority to remove potentially problematic individuals from the station or proactively patrol transit, officers



felt the public were increasingly unhappy with their inaction, which fuelled another amendment that still did little to affect officers' ability to enforce—a repeating cycle.

Overwhelmingly, police and peace officers felt they could not improve transit safety or even assuage the public's concerns about safety on transit. Due to perceived lack of support from their respective organizations, police and transit peace officers felt they could not enforce proper safety regulations and appropriate behaviour on Edmonton's transit system. This long period when officers felt unable to enforce led to officers' belief that unhoused vulnerable people no longer cared about the consequences that could incur from their behaviour on transit, either from using drugs or committing any type of crime. Even in the cases where officers *were* able to enforce behaviour on transit by charging an individual, they believed this person would not face any meaningful or lasting consequences from the broader criminal justice system—if they were held longer than a few days, they likely would not face punishment for very long. The criminal justice system, broadly, can be conceived as one element of von Bertalanffy's (1950) conception of a system. It is inextricably linked to and affects the actions of the public, law enforcement, politicians, healthcare officials, and social services, and the actions of these elements, in turn, affect the criminal justice system. As such, it is impossible to determine a single factor as the sole cause of officers' difficulties in providing safety on transit. According to police officers and TPOs, it is the interaction and communication—or, more accurately, the *lack* of interaction/communication—between these elements that has resulted in an unsafe transit system. Officers desperately wanted to provide safety to Edmonton's transit riders, but despite their best efforts, they felt that without the proper support or capabilities to enforce behaviour and Alberta's "*revolving door justice system*" not providing meaningful consequences, they were unable to provide a safe experience on transit.

*'We Need to Figure Out Something, Because We'll Never Get Ahead'*

I ended every interview by asking each officer what they thought could be done to improve safety on transit. The most common answers among both officer groups were the implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles (such as making transit centres and stations undesirable places to hang out in), implementing turnstiles, and increasing law enforcement presence and consistency on the system. However, many officers added that while these tactics would likely prevent crime and improve safety on transit, they would do little to address the root cause of *why* so many individuals choose transit stations to sleep in, hang out in, and/or use drugs. One police officer illuminated:

*It would work, but is it helping anything? It would help that transit system, it would sure clean it up. That person who's committing that inappropriate behaviour, is that helping them? I doubt it. You'd just be displacing it. The transit system would be clean, safe, but then where are you putting that problem then? Somewhere else. There's no police solution to it, I don't think. I think it's a societal problem. And I don't know. I don't know what we do. (Thomas, Police Officer)*

When asked what he thought could be done to make transit safer, one officer replied:

*Make drug use illegal again. So that—but then—ah, frick, it's just so loaded. Because you come up with stuff like that, and then you're like, okay, well, that's not going to be effective unless the police arrest. Police aren't going to arrest unless there's convictions. And if someone doesn't care about going to jail, then whatever. (Wyatt, TPO)*

Like Wyatt, when participants *did* provide a concrete answer to how transit safety could be improved upon, many did not think it would be realistic nor feasible due to limitations in funding, transit infrastructure, and the current direction of the criminal justice system, resulting in a profound sense of hopelessness. For example, after describing how turnstiles could improve safety on transit, one officer added, “*But I mean, we can't even get [LRT transit station/centre] doors locked at night, so maybe I'm asking for too much*” (Ben). As several TPOs illustrated:

*I've had 10 years to think about this, because obviously this is top of mind for all of us at this moment. More so now, but we're always talking about, “What can we do better?”*

*How can things be more effective? How can we stop having to come back to the same LRT station for the same problem every night, all night?" We're super frustrated. We want answers. But, you know, it's beyond our scope. It's beyond our budget. That's always what we hear. But even you know, even with an unlimited budget, I don't know what you could do. I have no answers. It's tough. (Vincent, TPO)*

*I really don't know what would make things safe because you can literally stab someone and almost get like, a slap on the wrist for it, so I don't know. I don't know how to combat these things. (Alicia, TPO)*

*It's gotten to a point where I shake my head and I go, 'I don't know how we're gonna get out of this.' There's not enough of us, and there's not enough peace officers for transit to do anything about it. Plus, our authorities can only go so far. And then with the criminal justice system being a little too lax with things—I don't think that more punishment is needed, but we need to figure out something, because we'll never get ahead. (Gregory, TPO)*

Recognizing the limitations of societal structures and the pitfalls in their current methods and practices when dealing with vulnerable people on transit, officers instead described an alternate way forward that prioritized social supports in the community. Officers admitted that in some cases, law enforcement and criminal justice intervention were not the answer to transit's safety concerns and growing disorder:

*I don't necessarily feel that punishing people that have no house and don't have the ability—I don't think punitiveness is necessarily what is required. From all of this social stuff, I think it has been brought up that it shouldn't be the police dealing with them, and I agree. (Jim, Police Officer)*

*What needs to happen, I feel is, at every level, we need to recognize that at the root of everything we're experiencing, like the person going around spraying bear spray at people, that's a person that's unwell, that's a person who, for whatever reason, their conditions won't allow them to live life in any other way. They're compelled to go around and bear spray people for whatever reason, right? So, I think the focus needs to shift from holding people accountable, towards treating it as essentially a public health concern or public health crisis, or emergency. I think things will change. (Samuel, TPO)*

Other officers held the perspective that a *combination of efforts* from multiple stakeholders within the community, including law enforcement, was the best way to balance safety with compassionate recovery efforts:

*It needs to be more like, enforcement focused and more COTT focused. The houselessness in Edmonton is an issue. [...] People need to be held accountable. It's like, "Okay, if I do anything stupid on transit, then yeah, I'm gonna get a ticket. But if I want the help, the option exists." [...] To make transit a safer place, I think we need to have a mixture of both enforcement and COTT. (Damian, TPO)*

*It will be a very holistic, large approach, probably multiple agencies and resources going down there [on transit], and it has to be sustained. That's probably one of the biggest things, we can't just go down there in a fleeting passing moment. It has to be long, sustained, and not just police, it's peace officers, it's outreach program, having those components. (Colin, Police Officer)*

As the above quotes exemplify, not all officers are strictly committed to law and punishment approaches to dealing with vulnerable people in the community. Indeed, many of them recognize that the population they frequently deal with does not and should not necessitate a call to law enforcement. Rather, they acknowledge that underlying trauma is causing unhoused vulnerable people to act a certain way, and officers want those traumas to be addressed appropriately.

Scholars across the world, including the US, Canada, and the UK, are increasingly drawing attention to collaboration efforts between policing and public health that have the potential to prevent violence (Bucerius et al., 2022; Christmas & Srivastava, 2019; Shepherd & Sumner, 2017). Several police precincts are partnering with organizations within the community to provide outreach, intervention, and treatment to unhoused vulnerable people to limit their contact with police—a notable example is Seattle's public safety initiative, Let Everyone Advance with Dignity (LEAD) (Beckett, 2016). LEAD's harm reduction principles and commitment to limit the 'policeability' of marginalized groups allow complaints from residents and businesses to be diverted away from 911 to community case managers. Once police officers recognized LEAD's effectiveness (e.g., responding to fewer calls for the same people), they were more willing to support the program, engage in direct outreach, and encourage citizens to direct complaints to LEAD case managers rather than law enforcement (Stuart & Beckett, 2021). Not

only did police officers see the same people less, but they also saw vulnerable people within their community actively improving while working with LEAD. However, in Edmonton, without the components that Damian and Colin described, such as outreach services working in tandem with law enforcement and social supports available within the community for vulnerable people to be referred to, police and transit peace officers are left to ineffectually deal with the issue alone:

*We are responding to the end result of intergenerational trauma, mental health crises, opioid crises, all this stuff. So yes, [peace officers aren't] going to solve [Joe]'s lifelong problems, but it might help you get to your destination safer. And maybe we can get [Joe] to the [shelter]. Maybe not. That's it. (Ben, TPO)*

When asked how safety could be improved on transit, many officers recognized that traditional methods of ensuring safety might work in the short term but would not solve the underlying *cause* of transit's current safety and disorder issues. While some officers felt there was no feasible solution to the issue or did not believe law enforcement had a place in managing vulnerable people at all, others suggested a collaborative effort from both law enforcement bodies and community outreach programs. Unable to effect change within the system they were operating within from their law enforcement element, police and peace officers felt that their current methods of providing transit safety were not working and desperately wished for a more appropriate way of dealing with vulnerable people on transit.

### *Conclusion*

Nearly every officer I spoke to believed that, over the past several years, violence, disorder, and safety issues have increased significantly on Edmonton's transit system. Not only did police officers and TPOs believe using transit was unsafe for the general public, but they also thought it was incredibly dangerous for vulnerable people frequenting the station *and* themselves.

Officers attributed the increase of unsafe conditions to a variety of reasons, but one they spoke about extensively was the City's removal of the loitering clause in Bylaw 8353. Without the loitering clause, police officers and TPOs dealt with two issues: 1) they no longer felt they were lawfully placed in the transit system, and 2) it hindered their ability to be proactive in transit spaces. For eleven months, officers felt powerless to rectify safety and disorder issues that were caused on transit, and thus problems proliferated. Even when Bylaw 8353 was amended with the inappropriate behaviour clause, officers—especially TPOs—did not believe their previous powers had been restored. Additionally, their main issues with the loitering clause removal were not rectified. As such, the officers had little faith in the City to provide them with adequate direction and allow them to deal with safety issues on transit.

While officers were dealing with changing bylaws, they were also facing intense negative attention from the media. After EPS issued a statement declaring their police members could have done a better job of connecting unhoused vulnerable people to community services, police officers felt unsupported by their management and were not enforcing proper behaviour on the transit system as actively as they were previously. Facing backlash from the media and public, both police and TPOs were directed by their respective managements to stop ticketing unhoused vulnerable people, disempowering them to enforce proper behaviour on transit. Their inability to enforce was further exacerbated by the City allowing transit stations to be used as temporary shelter locations, and officers' perceptions that vulnerable people's attitude towards transit's function was changing.

Since officers were *not* enforcing proper behaviour on transit for a period, they felt there were no meaningful consequences for the people causing safety and disorder issues. From the officers' perspective, they could not issue consequences through tickets because not only were

officers discouraged from utilizing them, but the tickets were also ineffective measures, as vulnerable people would neither pay them nor attend court dates. Additionally, since police officers were no longer charging people who use drugs for drug possession or use, neither police nor peace officers could provide consequences other than removing them from transit property. People who committed violence against others were most likely to be dealt with by the criminal justice system, but officers expressed frustration that they were simply being released after a short amount of time with clear intentions to re-offend. Without the other facets of the criminal justice system (such as prosecutors, courts, jail) *supporting* the officers' frontline efforts, police officers and TPOs felt unable to provide safety for both the general public and the vulnerable population who frequented transit stations.

Officers were so frustrated and downtrodden by the culmination of these elements that they did not see a feasible way of rectifying these issues alone, necessitating a systems theory approach to situating officer experiences and perceptions within their wider environment. They believed more support from the community and social services would provide vulnerable people with the opportunity to address the root causes that triggered actions constituting safety and disorder issues for transit riders. However, as I explore in the next chapter, officers faced significant challenges attempting to help vulnerable people off transit.

## Chapter Five: Vulnerable Persons on Transit

With officers' efforts to promote safety on transit for passengers and limit violence between marginalized people seemingly failing, they felt their role shifting from 'rabble managers' to 'recovery managers' (Stuart, 2014a). They were increasingly tasked with helping vulnerable people with 'recovery' efforts, such as transporting people to homeless shelters and offering information about various resources, including housing services and mental health and addiction support. However, officers often felt that their efforts had little impact. As one TPO explained to me, "*It's almost come to a point where sometimes it feels like Edmonton Transit and the Edmonton Police Service are tasked with managing—if not trying to solve—homelessness, with infrastructure and resources that were meant for public transportation*" (Ian). As I will discuss throughout this chapter, this task was often one that officers believed to be near impossible. This chapter explores officers' understanding, compassion, and *desire* to help vulnerable people who frequent transit. It deploys Sennett and Cobb's (1973) conception of *injured dignity* to illustrate their frustration and hopelessness due to their ineffectiveness, compounded by the lack of appropriate and available social support within the community system for those they were attempting to help.

### *'No Wonder They Would Rather Hang Out in a Transit Centre'*

Chapter Four outlined the range of circumstances that combined and interacted to transform the public transit system into a *de facto* holding space for marginalized groups, such as transit stations becoming sanctioned temporary shelters and the lengthy period where, due to the lack of enforcement and consequences, vulnerable people's perceptions toward transit's function changed. As described, officers believed this shift created an opportunity for disorder and danger



to proliferate, with little they could do to prevent it. As such, officers wanted to help ‘true’ vulnerable people by providing them options *other than* transit, as they deemed transit stations as inappropriate spaces for vulnerable people to shelter and congregate in. However, officers acknowledged that existing shelter locations were *also* undesirable areas for vulnerable people to hang out in and/or simply inaccessible. A COTT outreach worker revealed:

*There’s not a lot of necessarily great places for people to go. And they may get banned from there. Because of that, it’s understandable that people go hang out in the [transit] station. Because like, where else are they going?* (Taylor, Outreach Worker)

A police officer elaborated:

*I feel like the City just doesn’t have the appropriate spaces for homeless people to use, like, during the day and to be warm and to feel safe themselves. [...] You talk to a lot of the vulnerable people, and lots of them don’t really want to go to these shelter type places, because they have experienced problems themselves, it’s dirty or unclean, or they don’t like the people, or they feel unsafe themselves, right? So, they just want to be left alone in the transit centre. And like, can you blame them?* (Henry, Police Officer)

Acknowledging that vulnerable people had *nowhere better* to go placed officers in a tough predicament, because they felt their role was inadequate to implement meaningful solutions for Edmonton’s most marginalized community members:

*There’s no appropriate place for anyone to go in the city to shelter during the winter, which is incredibly frustrating, because then it rolls down to us. And like, we’re not equipped to deal with that.* (Patrick, TPO)

*When you say police the transit system, essentially what you mean is police the homeless, at least in the city of Edmonton. So the biggest problem with policing the homeless is that there’s inadequate resources out there to really get them out of the transit system. There’s not enough beds, there’s not enough social workers, there’s not enough well-paid or well-educated social workers.* (Ian, TPO)

Police officers and TPOs understood and empathized with vulnerable people’s reluctance to use alternate sheltering services because they knew there were few—if any—better options than transit. Many described the range of safety concerns unhoused community members have about existing Edmonton shelters:

*They don't want the shelters because there's a lot of theft, lot of assaults that happen at the shelters. So, I understand vulnerable people's attitudes towards those. They'd rather be in a tent away from there or wherever, at a transit centre, rather than at the shelter because they're fairly dangerous places. (Thomas, Police Officer)*

*People don't want to go to homeless shelters that exist. That's why their occupancy rate is so low. It's because they go there, and the first thing that happens is they get threatened to be stabbed, or they're stabbed, or they're blackmailed by gang members, or their stuff is stolen. They just don't want to go there. It's not safe. The homeless shelters aren't safe. So, the transit [stations] opened up and those aren't safe. It's cyclical. (Quinton, Police Officer)*

*There needs to be better options [...] because I would say 8 out of 10 people when I say "Hey, do you want to go to the [local shelter]?" would be like, "No, I get assaulted. I've been sexually assaulted there." (Bill, TPO)*

One of Edmonton's local shelters is a non-profit Christian social agency that began as a soup kitchen and has since grown into an organization offering clothes, meals, emergency shelter, and faith-based addiction recovery programs. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, scholars have documented a range of barriers that vulnerable people experience when trying to access shelters, such as shelter hours, location, and rules, as well as safety and victimization concerns (Keynan et al., n.d.; Donley & Wright, 2012; Ha et al., 2015). Not only did officers acknowledge many of these concerns, but they also discussed other pertinent reasons why people may not utilize shelter spaces. For example, one TPO described the Edmonton shelter's religious principles and its similarities to residential schools, acknowledging that this was likely a disincentive for many LGBTQ2S+ and/or Indigenous vulnerable people attempting to use the shelter:

*There needs to be a more appropriate place for these people to go that isn't the [local shelter], that isn't this like gross slum full of people that don't like gay people, for example. This is a rumor that gets told to us, but if you're a gay male and you're physical with another person, you'll get shit from the shelter workers there because it's a very Catholic organization. Which is hilarious in a dark humour kind of way, because residential schools? Rigidly Catholic. Basically, a huge symbol of colonialism. And then we go, and the only appropriate place for us to put people all day is into a Catholic shelter that doesn't like gay people? Or even worse, trans people? There's been times I've heard cops that have dropped trans people off at the shelter and, "Yeah, we'll give them a*

*bed,” and if they go into the next room like, “Okay, we’re gonna pray for you. Like, pray the trans away.” It’s like, this is the place where people can go in the city? Oh wow, no wonder they would rather hang out in a transit centre. (Patrick, TPO)*

Like elsewhere in Canada, Indigenous people are overrepresented in Edmonton’s homeless population (Anderson & Collins, 2014; Homeless Hub, 2022). Over half of the homeless population in Edmonton identifies as Indigenous (Homeless Hub, 2022) and approximately 1-3% identifies as LGBTQ2S+ and/or gender-diverse (e.g., non-binary) (Homeless Hub, 2022; Homeward Trust, 2023). As such, Patrick’s observation is especially concerning. LGBTQ2S+ youth and adults can face several challenges when accessing shelters, such as insensitive and/or ignorant staff, harassment and violence, and sex-based shelter segregation (which may cause transgender or gender nonconforming people to go without shelter) (Abramovich, 2012, 2017; Ecker et al., 2019; Romero et al., 2020; Spicer, 2010). Additionally, in recent years, jails and prisons in Canada have been described as “new residential schools” (Macdonald, 2016), as they function as an arm of the settler colonial state with intentions to assimilate, segregate, and manage Indigenous people rather than treat them with respect (Chartrand, 2019; Maynard, 2017; Monture-Angus, 1999; Nichols, 2017; but see Tetrault, 2022). Staying at homeless shelters may be similarly reminiscent of the trauma experienced by Indigenous people at residential schools, especially given how shelters often extend beyond providing necessities through the regulation of clients’ behaviour and ‘disciplining’ (e.g., shelter bans) them into productive members of society (Carroll, 2010).

In addition to potential resistance to accessing available shelters, people experiencing homelessness may also find harm reduction services similarly undesirable. Under the guise of minimizing risk to people who use drugs, supervised consumption sites can act as a spatial regulator to conceal and/or exclude “urban undesirables” from public spaces (Feldman, 2001, p.

74). Scholars are increasingly drawing attention to the various forms of governmentality people who use drugs are often subjected to within supervised consumption sites, illuminating how they are surveyed, socially controlled, and ‘responsibilized’ for their drug use (Fischer et al., 2004; Greene et al., 2022; McLean, 2011; Pereira et al., 2020). Not only can law enforcement presence within/near sites deter individuals from accessing supervised consumption services (Bardwell et al., 2019; Urbanik et al., 2022), but also so can the site’s policies and operational practices (e.g., operating hours, wait times, site layout, lack of staff assistance, method of drug consumption, bans, etc.) (Bardwell et al., 2021; Mema et al., 2019; Small et al., 2011; van der Poel, 2003). As such, many people may not wish to consume drugs in these spaces, instead forced to use in alternative—and perhaps riskier—locations such as public washrooms, parks, alleyways, or transit stations (Bardwell et al., 2021; Foreman-Mackey et al., 2019; Maier et al., 2024; McNeil et al., 2015; Geldart et al., in press). Yet, if vulnerable persons are continually excluded from shelters, harm reduction services, and transit property, where *can* they be?

As exemplified by participants, this was a question that plagued the minds of police officers and TPOs. Kammersgaard (2019) and Scher (2020) both advocate for a form of harm reduction policing that emphasizes connecting with and building meaningful rapport with the vulnerable community. Indeed, in an Alberta study, marginalized persons appreciated and desired park security guards, as they acted primarily in a harm reduction capacity and provided a sense of safety for participants, were respectful when checking up on them, and enforced rules fairly (Maier et al., 2024). As noted above, several police and TPOs displayed real compassion for and deep insight into the challenges LGBTQ2S+ and Indigenous vulnerable people experience on the street, illustrated by Patrick’s understanding of past colonial practices and its link to the current operation of social structures (e.g., the local shelter’s religious affiliation). While officers’

understanding of vulnerable people's situations, backgrounds, and reluctance to use the current services available to them motivated officers' *desire* to help—and perhaps improved relationship building (Greer et al., 2018)—it did little to rectify the lack of appropriate shelter/hang out spaces for unhoused individuals.

In another display of deep knowledge of many vulnerable people's realities, Damian, a COTT peace officer, explained why vulnerable people may opt to stay in the transit centres as opposed to designated shelter locations:

*If someone says that they're staying at a shelter—like [the local shelter], or [another shelter], or any of those—in terms of housing and priority, they go to the bottom of the list because they are staying at a shelter. So, a lot of people told us that that's why they stay in transit, because then they can say no to that question, that they're staying outside. So, if you're staying outside or a tent for housing, you're prioritized. If you're staying at a shelter, you're considered, "Okay, you're relying on the shelters," so a lot of people go to transit. And that's what we found out. I don't know if that's verifiable, but that's what we found out from talking to a lot of people. (Damian, TPO)*

Beliefs that people staying outdoors are prioritized for housing over those who opt for shelters is consistent with research with unhoused community members in Edmonton and other Canadian cities (Keynan et al., n.d.; Kohut & Patterson, 2022). Whether or not this is true in practice is irrelevant—if multiple people have provided this same reasoning to Damian and other officers, it is their belief and subsequent reality that staying overnight on transit rather than utilizing proper shelter spaces prioritizes them on affordable housing waitlists (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). Indeed, people experiencing homelessness may choose to stay outside so they can prove to social service staff that they are 'service-worthy' (Marvasti, 2002) and truly in need of housing. This may be a form of resistance vulnerable people employ against dirty and dangerous sheltering options and a strategy they feel they must deploy to navigate the social welfare system

successfully (Gowan, 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1993). However, others stay outside because they simply prefer it to shelters, for various reasons.

Despite officers' perception that violence has increased on transit and that passengers and vulnerable people face an incredible amount of risk by using it, transit vehicles and stations continue to be a refuge for many unhoused community members. While officers still believe that stations are inappropriate places to congregate, they understand that many vulnerable people have little to no other desirable sheltering options. Drawing upon interactions and conversations with unhoused people, officers characterized Edmonton homeless shelters as unclean, dangerous, and unwelcoming, especially to Indigenous people and LGBTQ2S+ community members. Additionally, they admitted vulnerable people may be using transit as a shelter space to 'prove to' social agencies that they are 'staying outside,' thus prioritizing themselves on affordable housing waitlists. However, this puts police officers and TPOs in a tough situation, as they are tasked with—along with providing safety—ensuring stations are clear and accessible for transit passengers, while simultaneously knowing vulnerable people have nowhere else to go. These nuances will be explored further in the following sections.

*'Not Having Any Solutions for Those People, It's Equally Frustrating'*

Without proper shelter locations for vulnerable people to stay in, transit centres have become *de facto* shelter spaces for marginalized groups. Police officers and TPOs alike have many interactions with unhoused community members in and around transit locations, sometimes offering them the opportunity to receive help, whether it be addiction services (Urbanik et al., 2022), physical and mental health services, or connecting them with other agents of help (e.g., HELP/COTT) (Butler et al., 2022). While officers *wanted* to help—for many, this

was the *primary* reason they wanted to join law enforcement—they found that providing help to marginalized people on transit was more complex than they initially thought.

Officers described three main reasons why they felt unable to enact meaningful solutions for the vulnerable community in Edmonton. First, there was an overwhelming perception among both police and peace officers that vulnerable people *did not want* help. Second, if they did want help, officers believed it was incredibly difficult for vulnerable people to *access* proper social services and resources. Third, of those who were able to access services, officers felt the current social system's structure made it *nearly impossible for them to succeed*. Left to deal with marginalized groups on transit in the face of those challenges, with little they could do to mitigate them, almost every officer I spoke to expressed deep-rooted feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and powerlessness. These feelings extended *beyond* their ability to do their jobs—such as enforcing rules and providing safety/security on transit—towards *generally being unable to help those they felt truly needed it*.

Despite officers offering their help or the help of external services, they believed there was little chance that vulnerable people would seize the opportunity or even want it:

*The problem is you can't help somebody if they don't want the help. Like if you say, "Hey, you want to get off the street?" they might say yeah, just because they think that's what you want to hear. But they don't.* (Bill, TPO)

*At the end of the day, if you say, "Is there anybody you wanna talk to?" and they tell you to go pound sand, then we don't have a lawful authority to hold them anymore. They're their own person, right? Like, they have the same rights as everybody else does. If you want to leave, you can. You know, we try and offer them—but they're pretty hardened homeless people too, right? Like, some of these people have been on the streets for a long, long period of time. [...] I don't know, if a person chooses not to participate, that is a choice.* (Jim, Police Officer)

*The bigger question, I suppose, is like—what we're striving to do for a person—like they got to want help in the first place. If they don't want it, how do we get it to them?* (David, Police Officer)

For many officers, the answer to David’s question could be answered with EPS’s Human-centred Engagement and Liaison Partnership (HELP) unit or the City’s Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT). These units are partnerships between law enforcement and mental health professionals that can connect vulnerable people on the streets to social resources. The main difference between the two units, besides the differing law enforcement partner, is that COTT is specific to the Edmonton Transit System, while HELP works city-wide. Scholars have long discussed the need for such enforcement-mental health partnerships (Finn & Sullivan, 1989; Deane et al., 1999; Lamb et al., 2002), as they can benefit both police officers (e.g., increased sensitivity to people in crisis situations; more information sharing between agencies; greater confidence and trust between police and social agencies) (Callender et al., 2021; Costigan et al., 2022; Horspool et al., 2016) and vulnerable people (e.g., reduced contact with criminal justice system; decreased stigma; greater access to mental health professionals/services) (Dyer et al., 2015; Kane et al., 2018; Reveruzzi & Pilling, 2016; Watson et al., 2010). While some participants expressed frustration over HELP’s effectiveness (e.g., Colin (Police Officer) explained, “*They are helping people, it just takes so much to help one person.*”), other EPS members have seen vulnerable community members be successfully housed via the HELP unit (Beaulieu, 2023).

For David, Edmonton’s HELP unit and COTT might be a perfect way of getting help to people who may otherwise not be able to access it. However, an outreach worker similarly reported feeling that COTT could not help people—in whatever way they needed, whether it be addictions counselling or information about housing—unless they truly wanted it:

*Sometimes you have somebody who kind of has to be ready. I mean, and it makes sense on paper that, you know, we should be able to help them, and actually we could, but they have to WANT to be helped, right? And everybody thinks that everybody wants help. But they may not that day. Or they may not be ready for a year. And it totally looks like—and*



*it's true, they could use our help (laughs). But, you know, the interest has to be there.*  
(Taylor, Outreach Worker)

Many participants felt powerless to help those they believed truly needed it, because they perceived that they either did not want the help or were not ready in that moment. Despite their own frustrations, some officers recognized why this was the case:

*A lot of the issues on transit are just individual people who have substance use problems or addictions and stuff. It just goes back, again, to I don't know why they don't want help, or that they just don't think they can get the help, because whatever. Yeah, I can't imagine it's easy to stop doing meth if they've been doing meth for years.* (Brett, TPO)

Another TPO elaborated:

*If you get close enough to any people, you talk to them, you hear their stories, they're horrible. They're incredibly terrible. But then on the same note too, there's no recourse for them. We can offer harm reduction and addiction treatment all we want on the streets, but in reality, like, good luck. Getting someone who is in active addiction, like, percentage wise, maybe 10% will want to try and maybe 80% of that 10% will fail, just because trying to beat opioid addiction is insane. [...] It's incredibly difficult. And there's no push in any direction. And you just like, go and we offer—for safe consumption sites, for example, offering information on those treatments. Yes, it's a good thing to do, and we should do it. But like, it can't just end there. Because it seems like this face level, "Look, we're trying to give people these options," but [...] it's like giving someone the choice to jump into lava. It's like, "We're giving you the option, why don't you want to take it?" Right? Cause it makes no sense. Why would you, if you're someone who's gone through all that, like the only way you can deal with the pain and all you've dealt with, the mental issues you have, is substance abuse? And then go, "Oh, yeah, I really, really, really want to go and make myself throw up for three weeks and maybe even die from the medical side effects of detoxing. Yeah, that sounds like a great idea. Thanks." And that's the way that a lot of them look at it, like, "Why the hell would I want to do that? That literally makes no sense." Which is fair. I wouldn't voluntarily go put myself through that.*  
(Patrick, TPO)

Officers expressed their understanding of the hardships people who use drugs face when battling addiction; they were also aware of how people's extended time on the streets may preclude them from wanting to access housing programs:

*There is a good chunk of people that said, "Hey, I don't want to go live in a house. I've been homeless for 10 years, and I choose to be homeless." We've heard that a lot. "I choose to stay in a tent." We've heard, "I can't live in an apartment because I've been*

*homeless for 20 years of my life, and I'm so used to sleeping outside with sounds and traffic construction and stuff, when I go into an apartment building, and it's quiet, I go crazy." And there's that. So, there's a lot of factors that play into it. (Damian, TPO)*

The perception that clients did not want help was significantly frustrating to officers attempting to help the vulnerable community. However, refusing help from police officers and TPOs may not necessarily indicate a lack of desire to receive mental health/addiction treatment or access housing services. In an Albertan study, Kohut and Patterson (2022) revealed that despite wanting to secure a private dwelling, several unhoused individuals found the prospect of transitioning from an outdoor lifestyle surrounded by their community to living alone indoors both extremely overwhelming and profoundly isolating. For those who had obtained housing in the past, mitigating social isolation by inviting friends over or returning to the streets (and leaving their accommodations unattended for long periods) fuelled conflicts with landlords (Kohut & Patterson, 2022) and may have contributed to their eventual eviction. Additionally, people experiencing homelessness may be unaware of or not understand eligibility requirements for housing programs, leading them to self-disqualify themselves and not apply, either because they anticipate they will be unsuccessful or because they feel undeserving (Kohut & Patterson, 2022; Parker & Albrecht, 2012). Alberta's rental market prices are likely also a significant barrier for people who would like their own place but would not be able to afford rent *and* necessities on their current government-assisted income (Anderson-Baron & Collins, 2019). Like Damian mentioned above, there are "*a lot of factors that play into it.*"

My data reveal that when people *did* want help, officers reported that services within the community were extremely difficult for them to access, thus presenting an additional barrier to their ability to enact solutions. For example, Vincent and David described how social services'

operating hours were often inconvenient and ultimately incompatible with the goal of helping vulnerable people on the streets:

*You need to have the person cooperative, and you need to have that external agency ready to accept them. That's usually another hurdle. We usually deal with people in the middle of the night who are dealing with this, those agencies are never open in the middle of night. [...] People that COTT deal with that are setting, you know—it's government business hours, unfortunately, right? We're dealing with like Service Canada, we're dealing with Alberta Health Services, daytime business hours, third party addictions counselling type people. Not 24/7 emergency. (Vincent, TPO)*

*If you're a social agency, and you're trying to support these folks, you should be supporting them when they need to be supported, not when your operating hours are. I think that's honestly why the cops started doing all that social support in the first place because we're the only ones working 24/7. [...] If these social agencies actually streamlined their work and were in a position to address those issues as they popped up, not when their operating hours are, I think that would improve policing the city of Edmonton and improve the services that these vulnerable folks need, at all hours of the night. [...] It just seems like it's inefficient. They're not solving the problem. We all have to agree on that. (David, Police Officer)*

In addition to inconvenient service hours, officers also lamented how the welfare system, as it operates currently, is riddled with inefficiencies, and actively works against helping vulnerable people better themselves, presenting yet another access barrier:

*Over the years, you find out that the quality of the entire system, or the way it's set up is just—there's just too many hoops, essentially. The hoops that somebody has to jump through, are I feel too numerous, there are too many. It's like a Mount Everest type of task for somebody to navigate on their own, right? And so even when we have somebody that says, "Look, I messed up, I need help, like, my mental health is shot, I can't get off the drugs. I've been on the streets for years." And even when they come to us, and they say, "Look, can we do something about this? Like, I'm ready. I'm ready for a change," we're kind of stuck there. And we say "Yeah, we'd love to, but—" The wait for housing, for example, is like nine months. To get into detox treatment for somebody to get off drugs is, again, it could be a two month wait. Just the system's ability to provide the very basic necessities, like personal safety, and just a little bit of healthcare. It's—where we are now, it's very difficult. It's very tough. (Samuel, TPO)*

*I've been able to see just how difficult it is for getting that process started. If you have absolutely nothing in your life, just the clothes on your back, you don't have a driver's license, a passport, a birth certificate, none of that stuff? To get ID, not impossible, but it*

*takes a while. It's not as simple as just like, showing up, "Hey, this is who I am, can you get me these documents?" It takes weeks, sometimes months. So again, to get a job you need ID. To get a place, you need the job to be able to pay for it. You know, there's other services, assistances like AISH [Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped] and Alberta Works and some other ways to get income. But that being said, the first step is to get ID for a lot of people. And if that takes weeks or months, that means you're on the streets for weeks and months while you're still waiting. And every night you spend in the shelter or on the streets is, you know, I can't even imagine how awful that is. (Liam, TPO)*

To illustrate further, Damian provided several examples of the daily challenges COTT clients face when attempting to access the social welfare system in Edmonton:

*Alberta Works—let's talk about the wait times. You call them on the phone—I can guarantee you right now, I can call them right now, and the wait time would be over 90 minutes. [...] Every time we call Alberta Works, they would say, "Hey, press two for emergency transportation," so you press that option. And then someone picks up after 90 minutes and they're like, "Hey, you pressed the wrong option, you have to go back and press this," so now you're waiting another—I literally waited on the phone once for four and a half hours. And the third person tried to transfer me. At that point, I said, "No, you're gonna help me," because I have this person in the back of the car with me, they want to leave Edmonton. They were dropped off here. They were brought here from BC [British Columbia] to deal with a warrant. They're trying to get their life together in BC. We pick them up, we transport them here, we fly them out, and then after they deal with the warrant, you drop them off at an Edmonton transit centre with an ETS ticket? What is that going to do for that person that's from BC? They're now homeless in the streets of Edmonton when they were trying to figure it out in BC. So, you call BC Services, "Hey, we have a guy here that's on your social assistance, and he's stuck here. Alberta Works won't pay for it, they're saying he's with you guys." And they're like, "Yeah, we'll pay for him. He just has to come into an office and pick up a check to go for a bus ride." I'm like, "Yeah, but where is your office?" "Well, it's in BC." So, he's in Edmonton. How does he get there in the first place? Those are some of the things—or you can—let's use a name, Joe. Just a random name. So, Joe goes bottle picking, spends the entire night, picks up a bag of bottles and has money to prepay a phone for like 90 minutes. Now Joe calls Alberta Works, and he's on hold for 90 minutes. And right before that, his minutes dried up just being on hold. And then when you pick up—or let's say even if you pick up in an hour—which is very unlikely—when you pick up in that hour, Joe has 30 minutes, and talking to a worker on the phone takes way more than 30 minutes, so now the call drops. Now you can't get a hold of him. So now because of that, Joe wasted 90 minutes on you, his minutes, now his housing team to the Homeward Trust, when they have a housing team available and they want to meet with Joe, they can't meet with him because they can't get a hold of him because he doesn't have any more minutes. And they don't know where Joe hangs out. So those are—it's like almost a domino effect. The wait times are*

*just—it's not—like I always say this: it's not designed to help people. Like, it's not.*  
(Damian, TPO)

Samuel, Liam, and Damian illuminated the multitude of challenges vulnerable people experience (and by extension, police officers and TPOs) when attempting to access social services in Edmonton, detailing long waiting times for affordable housing, detox treatment, or even obtaining a piece of identification (which is needed to access services). For decades, scholars have documented clients' dissatisfaction with how long it takes to access social services (Farabee et al., 1998; Moroz et al., 2020; Neale et al., 2008; van der Boor & White, 2020). However, it is not only wait-times and long waiting lists to access programs that causes frustration. Wusinich and colleagues (2019) reported the onerous process unhoused individuals must navigate to obtain and maintain required documents, and how that can prevent service access. Identifications cards can be frequently lost or stolen (Campbell et al., 2015), and it can be extremely difficult for vulnerable people to access the original copies of their birth certificates or high school diplomas. For example, when a service provider did not accept one unhoused individual's documents since they were copies rather than originals, they stated: "I was so infuriated with that experience that I have not gone back" (Wusinich et al., 2019, p. 4). Delays in receiving documents were also reported to be extremely frustrating for unhoused community members, as were the periods they continued to spend on the street waiting for service providers to reach out to them (Wusinich et al., 2019).

Police officers and TPOs were *similarly frustrated* by the waiting times and delays vulnerable people experienced when trying to access social services. Officers were often in situations where they were interacting with people in crisis who needed *immediate* care. To the consternation of many officers, they felt immediate intervention was not available for vulnerable

people. As one TPO explained, “*Only a handful of [social agencies] have the mandate to take immediate action, which is what most people need in that moment*” (Ian). Colin added:

*These lists have waiting lists and when that person is in a crisis of the here and now, it’s triaging that event in its immediacy. But it’s really hard to get somebody into someplace or in a bed or get some help, or whatever that may look like—psychological or psychiatric help—NOW. I would say it’s almost zero.* (Colin, Police Officer)

Even COTT members, whose role on transit is designed to help vulnerable people find suitable alternatives to spending time on transit, were frustrated by how difficult it was for one of their clients to access detox despite their intervention:

Elijah (TPO): *It was like, oh, five, FIVE days for one of our clients. Five days. And we took him with us. And he got denied four times in a row. And the fifth day, he finally got accepted for detox.*

Taylor (OW): *But I mean, they need to triage as they see fit as well, because they’re limited.*

E: *True, very true.*

T: *But it is bad that if somebody’s actually ready for detox and treatment, it’s HARD to get in (laughs). So that’s not good.*

Detox, as Quinones (2021) observes, is an extremely important service for unhoused people who use drugs, especially in the new era of increased drug toxicity. It is a space people can detox from drugs and then spend time recovering before accessing further services, such as mental health and housing services. However, when vulnerable people experienced barriers to accessing detox and other services within the community, officers felt an increased burden on their helping duties, especially since they had little—if any—alternatives to dealing with vulnerable people. As such, police and peace officers felt unable to provide meaningful help to these marginalized groups and expressed intense feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. To illustrate, two officers discussed the dearth of options available to them when they deal with clients who were unable/unwilling to access the shelter:

*I’ll bring Joe to a shelter because he’s drunk and pissed himself and he needs a pair of pants and somewhere to sleep. “No, no, we won’t take Joe, he’s too violent.” “What do I*

*do with Joe?” “I don’t know, not my problem.” Literally those words. So now Joe rides in the back of my car for a couple of hours till I can prop him up at Tim Hortons with a coffee. Because there’s NO other option for him. (David, Police Officer)*

*I had one guy, I found him [in a transit station]. He was laying there inside, and I said, “I’ll take you to the [local shelter].” He goes, “No, I either get assaulted there or people steal my stuff.” I said, “Well, where do you sleep?” [...] He said, “To be honest, I sleep in the sewer.” He’ll go down and sleep in the fucking tunnel. He says, “It’s not that bad. But at least I’m alone, and I’m out of the wind and stuff.” And I’m like, “Really? [...] When’s the last time you ate?” And he goes, “I don’t know.” [...] Me and my partner took him to McDonald’s and bought him a coffee and a McGriddle. We sat with him for about half an hour talking to him. He’s one of those guys that took meth, and he ended up losing his house, his wife, his kid, everything, just because he got hooked on drugs. (Bill, TPO)*

As David and Bill exemplify, police and peace officers had to employ creative strategies in the face of vulnerable individuals being unable to access or refusing the resources officers presented (Beaulieu, 2023). While both officers felt extremely useless in the moment, Wood and colleagues (2021) suggest law enforcement’s effectiveness may be best assessed under what they term ‘principled encounters,’ where officers act “within the confines of what they are able to control in the limited scope of the encounter” (p. 40). The principles of these encounters include “providing procedurally just treatment, reducing harm, supporting self-determination, ensuring safety, and redirecting people to appropriate mental health services whenever possible” (p. 40). David and Bill reported following these principles as best they could: they tried to redirect both individuals to appropriate social services, and when they could not, instead treated them with dignity, respect, and concern. To illustrate, David let Joe ride in his warm police car rather than leaving him to fend for himself on a city sidewalk while intoxicated, and Bill and his partner paid for the man’s breakfast, using the opportunity to listen to his situation and learn more about his background. However, as Wood and colleagues (2021) imparted, “the full impact of [officers’] efforts is contingent on the capacity of the mental health system to do its job” (p. 40). Officers did what they could to help vulnerable individuals—and by Wood et al.’s (2021) definition of

‘principled encounters,’ they were effective—but they were still frustrated by their inability to assist when the social welfare system would not ‘step up’ and ‘do its job.’

Two TPOs further explained how when resources for vulnerable people are limited, it *also* limits their ability to provide help:

*We do our best, but there’s not a whole lot that can help them aside from the [local shelter staff] will come and give you a sandwich. Even though like, you know, we have people that we want to help because they want to help themselves and they’re a good candidate, we can’t. We don’t really have the resources available to us. So, it’s tough.* (Katelyn, TPO)

*If someone needs help, we love to call the [local shelter], because then we don’t have to transport them. We don’t have to call police. We don’t have to call paramedics. They can come and do what they were designed to do, which is help people. Give them socks, give them shoes, transport them to the [shelter], yada, yada. But I don’t see them anymore. We used to call them all the time, the van, like their ambulance-looking thing, or just a van would come. I honestly don’t remember the last time I called them, the last time I’ve seen them. Like, it’s like they just don’t exist anymore for that option. [...] We’re trying to use other services that’s not policing, so that we can look like we don’t hate people. But sometimes, we just don’t have resources or options. And who’s gonna listen? Nobody.* (Oliver, TPO)

Despite some vulnerable community members expressing a want and need for the officers’ help, with limited and difficult-to-access resources and services, officers could not abide by these requests, leading to their hopelessness and frustration:

*I talked about people who they’re in a bad way, and they want the assistance, they want to change their life. They don’t want to do the things they’re doing every single day. But then again, not having any solutions for those people, either, it’s equally frustrating, it’s equally painful.* (Samuel, TPO)

Katelyn, Oliver, and Samuel were among many who expressed similar frustration with their inability to improve the lives of vulnerable people who frequented transit. Their desire to help is reminiscent of Stuart’s (2016) descriptions of how police officers in Skid Row wanted to ‘help’ vulnerable people and would do so by directing them to social resources they deemed



appropriate (e.g., mega shelters). However, there is one major differences from the Skid Row police officers to that of the TPOs' accounts. Many of the officers policing Skid Row believed resources, services, and treatments were all readily available to the people residing in the neighbourhood. As such, they would often be frustrated by the residents' lack of motivation to improve their own quality of life. While some participants did share this sentiment (which I explore at the end of this section), many recognized the dearth of resources and services readily available for vulnerable people in Edmonton and empathized with the range of barriers they experienced when trying to access them. Like the TPOs stated above, they knew people who truly wanted the officers' assistance. Unfortunately, officers were swiftly confronted with the reality that vulnerable people wanting "*to help themselves*" and "*change their life*" was simply *not enough* to warrant receiving proper care and attention, no matter how desperately the officers wished to facilitate their recovery. Further exacerbating these challenges, even when individuals *did* want help and *were* able to access social resources, officers outlined several barriers to vulnerable people's continued *engagement with and success* within these services and programs, including mental health challenges and structural/spatial barriers.

Many people experiencing homelessness struggle with some form of mental illness (Breakey et al., 1989; Fazel et al., 2008), such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or bipolar disorder (Creech et al., 2015; Perlman et al., 2014), and often the co-occurrence of these illnesses. In addition to potential substance issues, many officers found expecting individuals dealing with mental health challenges to comply and conform to everyday social norms—such as attending social service appointments—was futile and frankly, ridiculous:

*Once you get into some of the more like mental health, or drug addiction, you're not—there's wait times. You have to attend appointments. You have to be somewhat punctual. The housing list is long, and that's a long wait. And I mean, like 80%, at least—that's an*

*old stat, so probably more by now—of our homeless population have mental health issues. How can I expect them to attend appointments? (Ben, TPO)*

*It's hard to keep an appointment with a drug addict. It's hard to keep an appointment with somebody who doesn't have a phone, or a house, or a reasonable way of keeping track of, you know, their sleep schedule, the time of day, what day it is, what month it is. Especially somebody that—and that's just somebody that maybe has an addiction to drugs, let alone somebody that's schizophrenic or has a learning disability, compounded with homelessness and drug addiction, trying to set up a plan, and multiple appointments, for—it almost becomes a game of odds. [...] The more steps you need to take, the more appointments you need them to keep, the more phone calls or access to email that you need them to have, the lower the chances are that that service is going to be effective. But so many services revolve around that, that it's just, you know, it's mind-numbing to me. (Ian, TPO)*

Even Elijah felt like there was little COTT could do for people with severe mental health challenges and believed that this was a significant barrier to the type of help they could offer that would ultimately be successful:

*Even if they did want help, how? How? I can't take you to a doctor's appointment if you're going to be screaming at a lady because you think that she murdered your baby. Or we can't take you to view an apartment because you're going to strip down in the hallway and say that demons are chasing you. So, like the extreme psychosis, where they're incredibly mentally unstable, but just not violent—they have violent tendencies, sure, but they're not going to punch you for no reason. But they're the ones in the corner that are mumbling to themselves, and screaming and whatever that freaks people out. [...] I can't go over to Joe and be like, "Joe, do you have your ID? Okay, this is what we're going to do to get your ID, this is what we're going to do to help you with your detox. And then we can start looking at doing some walkthroughs for some places, so you can eventually pay some rent and get a job." No. You can't have that conversation with them. Because it's like, "Hey, Joe, how are you?" and he's like, "Demons are stealing my batteries!" It's stuff like that, where it's like, "Okay, Joe, like, are you okay? Do you want some food? When's the last time you had some water?" That's when we defer to helping them be a little bit more comfortable, because there's really not a whole lot else we can do for them. That would be, I would say, our number one challenge. (Elijah, TPO)*

People experiencing homelessness who also struggle with mental illness often face several barriers to receiving treatment. Some believe they can solve their mental health problems on their own and/or self-medicate via substance use (Kim et al., 2007), although this is also potentially influenced by the fear of stigmatization by service providers and subsequent social

rejection (West et al., 2011). Many vulnerable people with mental health conditions also have unique health needs requiring a range of various resources, but without integrated service provision, care can be disconnected and result in the individual being passed between organizations with no meaningful treatment (Adams et al., 2022), or what Seim (2017) terms ‘burden shuffling’ (p. 452). Continued frustration with social services’ ineffectiveness may cause them to reject utilizing mental health resources, which can directly affect later opportunities to access treatment and/or obtain employment (Poremski et al., 2014; Youn et al., 2019).

Additionally, echoing Ian’s point, Adams and colleagues (2022) spoke to many vulnerable people with mental health challenges who detailed how the increased uptake of online social service provision during and after the COVID-19 pandemic excluded them from accessing services, as several of them did not have access to a phone, computer, or wi-fi. Others expressed they did not have the literacy to successfully navigate rapidly developing technology (Adams et al., 2022) nor the inclination to learn (Le Dantec & Edwards, 2008; McGrail et al., 2018).

Apart from mental health challenges as a barrier to success, one police officer offered an alternate perspective on how accessing certain services is not necessarily indicative of continued success in that program. He described how the physical location of rehabilitation services could be another success barrier for people who use drugs:

*Talk to anybody on the street, ask them where rehab is. It’s right beside the drug dealers. It makes no sense. They put the rehabilitation centre for drug use in the spot where the homeless shelters are, where the drug dealers are selling to the vulnerable. It’s crazy, it makes no sense. These people will be trying to rehabilitate themselves, and they’ll go out for a smoke in the smoke pit, and they’re watching people smoke meth. How hard is that?*  
(Quinton, Police Officer)

Despite being essentially—but unofficially—tasked with helping the vulnerable community, many officers felt like they were continually failing. Many vulnerable people they spoke to did not want their help, and even if they did, services were either unavailable, difficult to access, or

imposed substantial barriers to successful treatment. Still, officers attempted to help, only for the cycle to begin again. Several officers discussed how frustrating and utterly *draining* every day became when they had few other options available to them to help vulnerable people away find alternate services to transit, especially when people did not want help in the first place:

*People refusing help, happens a lot. Especially in our industry, in our section on transit, with marginalized people, homeless people. There is a big stigma for being a rat in like a jail culture or homeless culture, because if you complain, typically what they say is, if they complain, they're gonna get it back later. So, they don't want to ever complain. There's victims, but there's never complaints. So, it's hard when we try and go there, and we're trying to offer our assistance. And okay, that's your right to refuse it. It just—it's hard to motivate yourself to keep going when you just keep getting shot down. Of like, why are we trying? (Vincent, TPO)*

*When we go to the [local shelter], it's like—here, there's the shelter bus, and we pick them up at Churchill and bring them to the [shelter] and they go, "I don't really want to stay at the [shelter]," and they're just off into the wilderness again. What was the point of that? Why did we spend all this money doing this if it wasn't going to do anything? But you can't force people to do what they don't want to do. We live in a free society where people are allowed to do basically whatever they want, as long as it's not, you know, harming or impeding other people. And so you can't force people to go to the shelters. You can't force people into mental institutions. You can't force people to go to hospital. You can't force people to do anything. (Gregory, TPO)*

*The crummy part is, we can only do so much as a police service. And so we can bring Joe to a social agency. But it's up to Joe and that social agency to see if what they offer is good enough for Joe to stay there. Or, you know, because of Joe's mental health and drug dependencies, he might just end up right back at the transit centre where I saw him yesterday. And so, it's a challenge, when you see the same folks over and over again, that you're trying to help, that are just not sticking to the help that you're offering, or the help that they're being offered just isn't enough for them to convince them to stay with that program. (David, Police Officer)*

Seeing the same people every day and receiving constant refusals of their offered help reinforced officers' *injured dignity* (Sennett & Cobb, 1973). Sennett and Cobb (1973) define dignity as “moving toward a position in which [one] deals with the world in some controlled, emotionally restrained way” (p. 22). According to officers, it was impossible to ‘move toward’ anything, as each day became a monotonous routine of carrying out the same tasks without any meaningful

outcomes—yet another circular chain (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Even when officers continued to offer help, attempting to “take responsibility for [...] a limit on their freedom,” they “lost a conviction of their dignity,” touched by “a powerlessness embedded in the self” (p. 37). After all, as Sennett and Cobb attest, feelings are one’s own problem, an indication that coping mechanisms have failed; even though officers were clearly aware that disconnects within the social system and the limitations that imposed upon them were among the many reasons for their frustrations, they felt “existentially responsible for the feelings” that the restrictions on their freedom to help created (p. 95). In other words, police officers and TPOs felt inherently “responsible for a situation [they] never made” (p. 103), a stance further entrenched by the system’s reliance on law enforcement to essentially manage homelessness without support from other elements within the system. Injured dignity, in this way, explains officers’ feelings of frustration, futility, and cynicism.

These feelings are consistent with current research on police officers’ front-line experiences of compassion fatigue (Miller, 2022; Ondrejková & Halamová, 2022; Papazoglou et al., 2019; Turgoose et al., 2017). Coined by Figley (1995), compassion fatigue is the ‘cost of caring,’ or a direct result of helping people who have experienced significant trauma, such as people experiencing homelessness and/or people who use drugs (Padgett & Struening, 1992; Sagram et al., 2021). Compassion fatigue can also be a consequence of compounded frustration from the inability to help or relieve people’s suffering, which has been documented in other helping professionals (e.g., doctors, nurses) (Back et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2022; Papazoglou et al., 2018; Pérez-García et al., 2021), and is clearly evident in my data. Compassion fatigue can also manifest as burnout, anxiety, and/or depression (Bride et al., 2007; Davies et al., 2023). Emotion management is critical to successful police work—Daus and Brown (2012) found that emotional

capacity when dealing with the public influenced police officers' perceptions of their own effectiveness. Moreover, police officers often adjust their own behaviour to give vulnerable people more attention, comfort, and empathy, interactions that are time consuming and mentally taxing (Soares & Pinto da Costa, 2019). When officers experience compassion fatigue, this emotion work can be significantly impaired. Indeed, one TPO admitted that after several attempts to offer resources and services to unhoused people who use drugs and getting rebuffed every time, he stopped offering:

*It's not that they're [social services are] not available. It's just, at least with the people that we're speaking with, there's a very, very small population of people that actually want to go through with it. You almost get to a point, at least myself, where I've kind of stopped. So I mean, there's definitely a point where we're missing the mark out of frustration. [...] I'm like, "Do you want to talk to somebody about getting clean or-?" "No." "Okay." You can't help somebody that doesn't want the help. And so, if I'm being honest, I think personally, I've become frustrated with just the amount of apathy that people have for their own sobriety and change. A lot of them seem not only content with, but to enjoy living from stairwell to stairwell, tent to tent, just living a transient lifestyle that kind of revolves around drug use. (Ian, TPO)*

The logic Ian provides in the above excerpt perfectly exemplifies Sennett and Cobb's (1973) main argument of how the emotional element of class cloaks the system's role in perpetuating inequality. According to Sennett and Cobb (1973), "power is legitimized and maintained [...] by a subtle and delicate balance" (p. 89). Many participants resented the social system for failing vulnerable people, and by proxy, also failing law enforcement officers. However, the system was too large and complex for officers to hold any one element accountable for their frustration, so instead, officers may turn on those who are deemed responsible by wider society. In this case, Ian turned his frustration on unhoused people who use drugs, who are often 'responsibilized' for their living situations, health, and safety (Coburn, 2010; Fraser, 2004; Urbanik et al., 2023). Ian levelled "all the accusations of weakness and [his own] inability to command respect that [...] authority figures implicitly level against [him]" onto vulnerable people, blaming them for his

frustration over not being able to help, because he perceived they enjoyed their current lifestyle. This legitimizes the system's power, which is "like a cloak of secrecy over the origins of one's anxiety" (p. 90), and this *logic of discontent*, in turn, "leads people to turn on each other rather than on the 'system'" (p. 173). As people battle each other for respect, "the class system of authority and judgment-making goes itself into hiding," leaving the system unchallenged (p. 150).

Ian's apathy towards offering unhoused people who use drugs resources other than transit is especially concerning, given he has been a transit peace officer for just a few years. What is perhaps more troubling is the fact that he is not alone. Several officers who had a handful of years on the job—police and peace officers alike—expressed greater disillusionment, demoralization, and frustration about interacting with vulnerable people in downtown Edmonton than officers with more experience. This difference was quite stark with police officers, yet less distinct with transit peace officers, likely because TPOs with more experience are still working on the street, patrolling the transit centres/stations and interacting with vulnerable people regularly. As police officers gain more experience, they typically move into senior positions or specialized units that limit their interactions with vulnerable community members, and in doing so "the guilt and uneasiness about being in a higher position, and causing someone pain, can be stilled" (Sennett & Cobb, 1973, p. 204). Transit peace officers, conversely, have little opportunity to eventually 'get off the street' as their career progresses, which could be a contributing factor to their intense exhaustion and frustration with policing the transit system. However, as Sennett and Cobb (1973) argue, how "people try to keep free of the emotional grip of the social structure, unintentionally, systematically, in aggregate keeps the class order going" (p. 258). Officers moving from one set of circumstances to another, such as officers moving off

the street, leaves situations and existing system structures intact. Officers' injured dignity thus maintains the system's legitimacy despite its inability to serve the needs of all citizens (Sennett & Cobb, 1973).

Despite transit spaces being prime locations to interact with vulnerable people and offer resources/services, most of the police officers and TPOs I spoke to believed that many vulnerable people did not want their help. While some officers understood this sentiment, such as recognizing the difficulty in detoxing from long-time drug use or the eeriness of a quiet apartment after becoming accustomed to sleeping outside for several years, this attitude nonetheless frustrated them.

In the seemingly uncommon cases when people *did* want the officers' help, many officers described several barriers vulnerable people experienced when trying to access these services. Access barriers included the social services' operating hours, long wait times (for housing, detox, mental health treatment, etc.), and the lack of services that have the capacity and resources to take immediate action for people in crisis. In the *increasingly* rare case that people *did* want help and *could* access the services they needed, officers believed additional barriers existed that affected a vulnerable person's success within those services. For many of the vulnerable people they interacted with, officers perceived that their mental health was not at a level to partake or be continually successful with many offered services. Additionally, using emails and phone calls to make appointments with a population of people who may not have reliable access to either significantly decreased the likelihood of successful treatment. Police and transit peace officers were left to deal with the increasing amounts of people on transit by offering resources and referring them to services where they could, but getting constant refusals only served to fuel feelings of defeat, cynicism, and futility.



*'We're Given Basically a Sliver of the Issue'*

Not all officers believed that attempting to help vulnerable people on Edmonton's transit system was not worth the effort. As Sennett and Cobb (1973) assert, an officer "is not converted into a simple, self-absorbed economic individual on the job, because human sensitivity is not a thing [one] can leave at home" (p. 102). Indeed, some officers expressed wanting *to do more to help* vulnerable people, yet felt they could not do so given their current role in the 'care system':

*A lot of us want to see them do better so we don't have to deal with them constantly. Like, I don't want to know you by name and know that you're going to hurt me. Like I'd rather you do better so I don't have to see you again, so I don't have to deal with you for these negative reasons. (Oliver, TPO)*

Despite often being the first point of contact when dealing with people experiencing homelessness, substance misuse, or mental health crises on transit, TPOs felt their role was not appropriately integrated with social and health services:

*Even though we are in contact with folks who need this sort of help, who need this sort of assistance—every day we interact with them, we talk to them, we know who they are, we know essentially what they need and what they're looking for—overall, no one has said, "Look, you as peace officers are going to be part of the larger umbrella of enacting solutions for people." Right now, whatever policies we have, whatever direction we've been given, we're given basically a sliver of the issue, and that's safety on transit. "Essentially, you're there to address immediate concerns in the moment, but outside of that, don't worry about this big picture. Don't concern yourself with that," is kind of more or less the messaging we get. (Samuel, TPO)*

Police officers *also* felt their current role was not suitable to properly deal with the proliferation of unhoused vulnerable people, both in downtown Edmonton and transit locations:

*Not all drug addicts are criminals. And not all folks with mental health [issues] are criminals. So why do we treat them like that? Because that's the social response we have. That's the only response we have at 3 a.m., is for a cop like me to come and arrest you because you're yelling at the sky because you're high. You're not attacking anybody—if you're doing that, I have to deal with you. But that's the only response we have. (David, Police Officer)*

*Where's the police's response [on transit]? Realistically, we can't put everybody in jail. But we need to figure it out. And it costs money—a large amount of money on the front end. Without some of these supports in place, we're gonna continue to spiral in the way we are, and I just think that's super challenging for us.* (Colin, Police Officer)

Despite being essentially tasked with helping vulnerable people find better options than transit and being the first point of contact to provide them with resources, police officers and TPOs are not *formally* part of Edmonton's care system. This system includes various organizations involved with the care and treatment of our most marginalized, such as physical and mental health clinics, housing programs, shelters, harm reduction services (e.g., supervised consumption sites), program centres (e.g., job training), and addiction recovery facilities (Miler et al., 2021; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Actors within this system include doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, social/outreach workers, case managers, and service staff (Hauff & Secor-Turner, 2014; Henwood et al., 2013; Qian & Hauser, 2022). The care actor label likely also informally extends to librarians and security officers (Anderson et al., 2012; Kammersgaard, 2021; Maier et al., 2024; Geldart et al., in press), as vulnerable people often utilize the services available in the spaces in which they work.

Indeed, police officers and TPOs alike were in frequent contact with people experiencing homelessness and were often the ones attempting to connect them with these care services, yet they did not have the resources to properly do so. One TPO explained that when dealing with someone during a mental health crisis, *“Sure, we have the back of our car, but that's about it to place someone. We don't have any kind of infrastructure for that”* (Vincent). To provide someone with the help they need, officers must rely on community supports, which, as discussed earlier, can be limited, and do not guarantee the person in crisis will *actually* receive needed treatment.

My data also reveal that while the EPS and the City have their respective HELP and COTT units—collaborative teams that bridge law enforcement into the care system—many patrol officers do not have the same ‘helping resources’ extended to them. Elijah, a COTT officer, explained, “*COTT’s good, because we actually have the resources, the vehicle, the time to do what it takes to actually help somebody.*” Another COTT team member continued to explain their ability to navigate social/housing programs their clients could partake in, and how they could arrange appointments while also facilitating transportation to those appointments—activities patrol officers would not have the resources nor time to accomplish. Damian further illuminated:

*When you start a shift and you have 15 calls on the board, every call, like, you don’t have the time to be like, “Okay, how can I help you?” Like our patrol team doesn’t have an hour or hour and a half to just talk to them. We [COTT] usually talk[s] to people for months before they even do any sort of work with us. (Damian, TPO)*

While the TPOs assigned to COTT felt they had the time to offer their help and believed they were an effective element of Edmonton’s care system, patrol officers differed in their experiences; due to the nature of their patrol duties, transit peace officers were disconnected from the system of care. Indeed, the role of patrol officers is often to reproduce order by “employ[ing] a system of rules and authoritative commands to transform troublesome, fragile situations back into a normal or efficient state” (Ericson, 1984, p. 7). As such, many of them had to rely on COTT in the absence of other appropriate options available to them. Unfortunately, some of the TPOs I interviewed did not believe COTT was a reliable resource, nor readily available to officers while on patrol:

*My experience with COTT is not the best, just because whenever I need them, they’re not there. So, I mean, I know they’re trying to get more units out and stuff, but that’s basically my thing with COTT is, I don’t really have much use for them, because they never really*

*help me with my problems (laughs). It's a little selfish of me, it's like, "Well, you guys are never here for me." (Wyatt, TPO)*

*I've probably offered it [COTT] to hundreds of people. Here's the thing, too, is COTT is more recently—they're working throughout the night. [...] They were originally just 8 to 4 Monday to Friday. And we're the night team, so obviously we ask people if they want COTT and they say, "Yeah," we're just like, "K, well, you're shit out of luck. They're not working." I guess I'd say maybe like 15 or 20% of them would say yes. 90% of those 15 to 20%, it's been during the nighttime, so they can't do anything. (Brett, TPO)*

While I did not interview any police officers that were a part of the EPS' HELP unit, I spoke to many police officers who had utilized the unit while on patrol. Most characterized HELP as a useful resource, as the unit could essentially take over the call and provide an outreach worker who could deal with vulnerable people with mental health challenges. HELP was not always available, but most officers found them to be generally reliable when they were called, a stark contrast to police officers' perceptions of COTT.

While their mandates are similar, it would be a disservice to compare HELP's effectiveness and availability to COTT's. The HELP and COTT units were technically launched in 2021 (COTT 10 months after HELP). However, HELP was already operating in 2020, had partnered with 15 organizations, and rolled out with 8 vehicles, 8 police officers, and 10 navigators (Junker, 2021). COTT, on the other hand, was only initially resourced with 2 vehicles, 2 transit police officers and 2 outreach workers (Lachacz, 2021). Despite having funding for seven TPO-outreach worker partnerships, a high-ranking City employee explained they were having trouble finding and hiring outreach workers for COTT. At the time of our interview in January 2023, he told me they had only recently hired a third outreach worker. By mid-February, a fourth team started to patrol LRT stations. As such, it is likely that TPOs were more frustrated with COTT than police officers were with HELP because there were only two COTT teams available for the city's entire transit system. However, the City has made efforts to increase

COTT's presence on transit. As of August 2023, they boast seven operating transit teams with near 24/7 coverage from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. and are piloting an information booth in Churchill station on Tuesday and Thursday mornings to provide consistent resources (CTV News, 2023). It is possible these changes will improve COTT's availability and provide patrol officers a reliable resource to call upon COTT when interacting with vulnerable people on transit.

However, unlike HELP and COTT officers, patrol officers remain disconnected from Edmonton's care system. Due to this disconnect, many felt unable *to do more than displace* vulnerable people from congregating in transit spaces, shuffling them from one area to the next:

*Definitely, the most frustrating thing is [...] the nonstop similar type calls, where we're not effective in how we deal with it. We can break it up at the moment, but then it just continues five minutes later somewhere else. [...] Transit peace officers are not effective in our current role with our current tools, because all we're doing is displacing the problem.* (Vincent, TPO)

Many officers illuminated how the intrinsic structure of public transit exacerbated issues related to displacing vulnerable people. Edmonton has 25 transit hubs, 18 LRT stations, and an active fleet of over 1000 buses and 94 train cars. At the time of data collection, there were approximately 100 TPOs on staff who were responsible for responding to all nuisance and disorder calls on transit across the city. Additionally, downtown's underground LRT stations are only a few blocks apart and have multiple different entrance points. So, even when TPOs can "*break it up at the moment,*" it is easy for someone to find a different spot within the station to hang out, or simply walk to the next station and hang out there once patrol TPOs leave to deal with the next call. As one TPO explained: "*Although maybe I'm 'helping people'—with sneer quotes on that—you go one station over, and it's a different story*" (Ben, TPO). Oliver added:

*It just seems like we can't keep up. We can't cover it. You and I can walk down to Churchill station, I'll clear it out, we'll come back up, we'll come back down in 20*

*minutes again, and it'll be right back full, and it'll be just as bad as it was before.*  
(Oliver, TPO)

During data collection, I was able to confirm Oliver's claims. In mid-February of 2023, I walked with a TPO patrol team throughout Churchill station and took detailed notes on my observations immediately afterwards. My fieldnotes inform the section below. The Churchill LRT station is one of Edmonton's larger subway platforms, with several underground pedways connecting to various downtown locations, such as the Royal Alberta Museum, Law Courts, and City Centre Mall. The TPOs were determined to show me how busy the hallways could get and how they dealt with the crowds, but they were shocked at how few people were in the stations at the time. We only encountered five vulnerable people dispersed throughout the station, three of whom were in a group and left when the peace officers rounded the corner. We returned to the TPOs' office building as they lamented how dead the station was, regaling me with a story about a call they received earlier that morning—a group of people were sitting in one of the pedways, and when a TPO patrol team went to move them along, it turned into a knife fight. They brought this story up multiple times—I think they were disappointed that I could not witness precisely how dangerous and violent they believed transit had become. About twenty minutes later, a high-ranking City employee came into the office. He told the TPOs that he had been walking through the pedways in Churchill, and they were full of people. He consequently asked the TPOs to “*hammer them out.*” Less than a minute later, we were back in the elevator and returning to Churchill station.

Between two long, winding hallways connecting the concourse to City Centre Mall is a large alcove. When we came through earlier, one man was sitting against the wall, surrounded by several \$10 and \$20 bills. It now held a small crowd of people. The man initially sitting there

alone had put away the money as the TPOs had asked earlier, but he had not left like he promised. Once the TPOs approached and announced to everyone that they had to leave, a few people scattered without comment. One man with a bike attempted to ride away, but one of the TPOs caught up and told him he could not ride deeper into the station, pointing him to the stairwell that would bring him outside. Meanwhile, the other TPO was negotiating with a young man putting up a verbal fight, shouting that he was an Indigenous Elder. He left shortly after.

Two women had blankets spread out on the floor and were carrying their belongings with a handheld cart. They made friendly conversation with the TPO as they gathered their things, told him they were going to the library, and left. The last remaining person was the man who had been sitting there originally. As one of the TPOs told him that he could not sit there anymore and urged him to find somewhere else to go, the other TPO, who was watching from afar with me, explained that they could not let people stay in the station because otherwise they would find a different spot to hang out in. The TPO also expressed the futility in it: *“At least this way, they’ll go outside, walk around, and wake up a bit before coming back in a different entrance.”*

Despite that alcove being mostly clear when we walked through it the first time, our return to a crowd of people shows how quickly the situation on transit can change in a matter of minutes. This also exemplifies how fast the peace officers’ work is *undone*, a process that the TPOs are clearly very aware of and frustrated by.

Surprisingly, it was not only the TPOs that spoke to the challenges of not having a more appropriate response in dealing with vulnerable people on transit. Police officers—despite their expanded authorities compared to TPOs—felt they could not do much more than shuffle people around because they had virtually no other options. Ryan and Colin explained:

*At the end of the day, in downtown Edmonton as a cop, my job is dealing with the homeless population. [...] Realistically, what's the [solution] for them? Probably not anything I can do. So, it's just taking them out of one area that they're using drugs in, or trying to get them into housing here, but then having it not work. It's realistically just kind of moving people from one place to the other. (Ryan, Police Officer)*

*Where do we put these folks that are drug addicted, have some mental health concerns? What do we do with them? That's the biggest challenge. Is an LRT tunnel, or platform concourse, is that an area that we want them to hang in? They're vulnerable folk, they're being victimized by other criminals, and then potentially they could be victimizing other 'normal' citizens. Is that the best place for them? [...] Where do they go? What do we do? How much outreach can we offer? Jail's not a spot for them. They can't be in the LRTs. So, if we go down there, we're just displacing it temporarily, and they're going to come back. Where do I put these folk? That's the biggest challenge. And where are the peace officers? How do they deal with it? And it trickles down from there. (Colin, Police Officer)*

Law enforcement's role in displacing people experiencing homelessness from 'prime space' to 'marginal space' (Davis, 2006) has received an abundance of scholarly discussion. Exclusionary policing practices gained popularity with the advent of Kelling and Wilson's (1982) 'broken windows' theory, which proposed the idea that law enforcement's targeting of minor disorder could prevent the escalation of more serious crime. This more aggressive form of policing, which includes writing tickets, arresting individuals, stopping and frisking, and issuing 'move along' orders, was implemented in several American cities, such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Bratton, 2015; Dozier, 2019; Skogan, 2006). These practices eventually migrated to Canadian cities, including Toronto, Vancouver (Huey, 2001; O'Grady et al., 2011), and Edmonton (Scherer et al., 2020).

Some scholars argue 'broken windows' theory and resulting policing practices are necessary to reduce crime and are beneficial for the community (Skogan, 2008; Wilson & Kelling, 2017), although O'Brien and colleagues (2019) state that support for the theory is



exaggerated. Others have discredited the approach, arguing that more aggressive police tactics do not reduce crime (Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006), destabilize neighbourhoods (Haldipur, 2020), and increase punitive surveillance and control of vulnerable people (Kohler-Hausmann, 2018). Such practices disproportionately and negatively impact racial and homeless communities, create financial burdens on the criminal justice system due to increased punishment and incarceration, and erode public trust in law enforcement (David & Mitchell, 2021; Kamalu & Onyeozili, 2018). Additionally, law enforcement officers enforcing ‘move along’ orders may actually serve to *prolong* displacement and perpetuate homelessness among vulnerable and marginalized groups (Darrah-Okike et al., 2018; Herring et al., 2020).

However, displacement tactics used by law enforcement agents are not always intended as a form of punishment. In LA’s Skid Row, police officers explained their more aggressive policing style (e.g., destroying tents/property, forcing people off sidewalks) as their way of ‘helping’ people, as they believed it incentivized vulnerable people to access services (Stuart, 2016). Like staff in drug treatment courts (Kaye, 2019), law enforcement officers may view their interactions with vulnerable individuals as “opportunities for rehabilitation” (Hora & Stalcup, 2008, p. 745).

As evidenced in my data, police officers and TPOs often offered services and resources to members of the vulnerable community, both to remove them from locations they deemed inappropriate (e.g., transit) *and* to improve their current situation (e.g., providing the opportunity for food, shelter, etc.). For law enforcement officers, these two goals are often inextricably linked. Officers sometimes must become ‘demand negotiators’ (Huey, 2007), where they respond to contradictory demands from competing groups (e.g., residents, politicians, social service agencies) who simultaneously want the police to displace vulnerable people from certain spaces,

limit their contact with such groups, and build relationships with them to provide support (Herring, 2019; Huey, 2007; Zakimi et al., 2022). Even people who frequently encounter police characterize police behaviour as contradictory, with officers constantly observing their communities but never being available when there is an actual emergency (Berardi, 2018; Prowse et al., 2020; Urbanik, 2017).

Officers are also subject to changing laws (e.g., marijuana legalization) and informal practices that have become organizational norms, such as the instances I discussed in Chapter Four, where TPOs were directed to stop ticketing people experiencing homelessness, or police officers were told not to lay charges for drug use or personal drug possession. Doing so could result in reprimand. Yet, without the ability to deal with them via the criminal justice system, and/or provide vulnerable people with help (e.g., refusals, lack of service availability), they reported displacement was the only tactic available. Officers reported having to use discretion to either: a) force members of the vulnerable community out of transit spaces, or b) let them stay, which would potentially invite increased social disorder and/or jeopardize everyone's safety on transit.

Being confronted with such decisions could increase the likelihood of officers experiencing *moral compromise*, where they are forced to follow orders contradicting their own values, or *moral distress*, when officers are prevented from doing what they believe is morally 'right' (Blumberg et al., 2018; Loyens, 2014). By taking the whole system into account (von Bertalanffy, 1950), officers saw "beyond the institutional demands" and put "the institutional obligations against a set of humane values, and that is what makes the problem" (Sennett & Cobb, 1973, p. 209). Constantly dealing with the moral implications of their decisions may

increase officers' feelings of guilt, shame, and burnout (Miller, 2000) and is associated with higher levels of compassion fatigue (Maiden et al., 2011; Stancel et al., 2019).

Participants were no strangers to these feelings and experiences when dealing with vulnerable people on transit. My data reveal resorting to displacement as a tactic *only exacerbated* police and peace officers' frustration, hopelessness, and despair. In discussions of how to help vulnerable people off transit, many officers did not have any solutions:

*I don't see an end to it. I don't think it'll ever stop having like the vulnerable population being there [on transit]. So it's always going to be—you're always going to need police or you're always going to need transit security or peace officers there. Because I don't think it'll ever discourage them from not being there. So, I think that's the most difficult part is, is there an end to this at all? I don't see it. (Thomas, Police Officer)*

*I wish something could be implemented because we're spinning our wheels with no traction, and constantly dealing with the same people all day every day. That's why we are constantly just going up, and we already know who we're dealing with. "Oh, you're overdosing again? Didn't you learn your—last time you almost died." "Oh, you're robbing someone again. Didn't you learn your [lesson] last time? You got charged for that." And now here he is again. So, it's very frustrating. We're not effective. We don't have a magical plan. I don't know what we could do differently. It sounds very depressing, doesn't it? (laughs) I don't have any good answers for us. (Vincent, TPO)*

Despite having an average of 22 years policing experience between them, Thomas and Vincent could not provide any solutions for law enforcement's efficacy when dealing with vulnerable people, nor for how to encourage vulnerable people to help themselves within Edmonton's current reality of failing social infrastructure. In Sennett and Cobb's (1973) words, they could not "solve the riddle of [their] own survival when others suffer" (p. 205).

Notably, even though they have differing mandates, authorities, and duties, *both* police and transit peace officers had a bleak outlook on how they could implement meaningful solutions for vulnerable people on transit. They expressed similar levels of frustration, hopelessness, and futility. This finding necessitates looking at the wider system, suggesting that the underlying

reason for their feelings of ineffectiveness specifically regarding helping vulnerable community members is due to *external* factors (e.g., refusal of resources, lack of social service availability in the community, etc.) rather than their differing authority and power. While some TPOs expressed desire for the ability to utilize the Mental Health Act (which would enable them to non-criminally arrest an individual they believe is in a mental health crisis and force them to seek treatment), many police officers, who *have* Mental Health Act powers, explained that hospital wait times “*are hours and hours and hours and hours*” long, which “*takes away [their] resources to do other things*” (Jim, Police Officer). One TPO added:

*I've heard stories of a [COTT] client that we used to work with where constables have arrested her on the Mental Health Act, taken [her] to the hospital, said to doctors, “She doesn't leave this hospital until she talks to someone, so she can get proper medication and the help that she needs.” This is a constable doing this, and this is going over and above what a constable is required to do. And the next day she was talked to, and the doctor's like, “You want mental health help?” And she was just like, “No.” And then he's like, “Okay,” signs the paper, and then she leaves. So there's no consistency and follow up when it comes to mental health here in the province from my experience. (Elijah)*

The lack of “*consistency and follow up*” for people seeking mental health resources and treatment was a significant frustration for police officers and TPOs. They were often stuck between two realities: wanting to help people—and knowing their intervention was necessary for the safety and comfort of vulnerable people—while also recognizing their efforts and the surrounding social system were completely ineffective. DiMario (2022) describes this type of regulation as *palliative governance*, which emerges in “contexts of failure, crisis, and emergency, where prevailing approaches to governance are recognized as inadequate and dysfunctional by a segment of officials and the public, but resource and policy constraints do not allow alternatives to be fully pursued” (p. 865). Agents exercise “compassion and care in relation to a suffering subject,” whom “the state is neither willing to let die nor willing (or able) to fully care for” (p. 866). With their constant helping efforts resulting in failures, police officers and TPOs could only

“*maintain* bare life amid constraint,” endlessly responding to “other failed forms of governing poverty and suffering” and leaving vulnerable people in perpetual limbo (p. 867; emphasis added).

To combat their continual failures, a subset of officers proposed a controversial solution to improve Edmonton’s present reality—compulsory treatment for vulnerable people in mental health and/or addiction crisis:

*Instead of letting them [unhoused vulnerable people] function on the street—which is the current program—and try and get by as best as they could, but we—sometimes against their will—move these folks to a facility, let’s call it a Happy Wellness Centre, where we actually focus on their addictions. We actually focus on their mental health, and give them appropriate medication if that’s required, give them counselling, give them some meaning to their life, if that’s job training, if that’s, I don’t know, esteem training, whatever it might be, so that they can feel good about themselves, and step out of those doors and be meaningful members of society. What WE consider society. How would that look? I think that would look pretty good. (David, Police Officer)*

Taylor (OW): *This one COT team in Calgary were commenting that there may be some statute where you can—if you get them to agree to it—we can hold them for two weeks based on a mental health or an addiction detox. [...]*

Elijah (TPO): *Let’s say [in] that scenario, we ended up legally detaining that person and keeping them for detox, and they’re forced to go through detox, they agree with [it]. It’s not just we put them in detox and forget about them. It’s: you’re in detox, we’re following up every other day, setting up appointments, getting things going, being ready for when you legally leave detox. Okay, now we have A, B, C, and D that we got to do. And let’s set you up for success, because we don’t want to arrest you in three months for the same thing to put you in detox again, because now we’re doing the exact same thing just in a different way.*

Compulsory mental health and addiction treatment has garnered much attention in Alberta with the United Conservative Party’s (UCP) recent announcement of the Compassionate Intervention Act. This Act, which would be the first of its kind in Canada if passed, would give police officers (and family members/guardians) the ability to ‘refer’ vulnerable people into involuntary treatment if they pose a risk to themselves or others (Tran, 2023). Mental Health and Addictions

Minister Dan Williams framed the implementation of such a policy as a more compassionate way of dealing with people in crisis, arguing placing them into mandated treatment facilities would be a more humane and caring option instead of letting them “stay there [on the street] and suffer” (Mertz, 2023b). However, law experts and harm reduction advocates have criticized the Act, arguing that it not only violates the Canadian Charter rights of life, liberty and personal freedoms, but also decreases drug tolerance, which can increase risk of fatal and non-fatal overdose (Tran, 2023), mirroring concerns that others have raised (Ledberg & Reitan, 2022; Rafful et al., 2018; Vo et al., 2021, Wild et al., 2001). Others have argued that if the individual neither wants nor is motivated to take part in treatment, compulsory treatment may be ineffective (Simpson et al., 1997; Tran, 2023; Werb et al., 2016).

Officers who discussed compulsory treatment as a solution for dealing with vulnerable people in Edmonton understood the risk of violating people’s rights and did not take it in haste. In the face of increasing powerlessness and failure in their law enforcement role, however, they could not conceive of an alternative that would appropriately address the needs of people requiring help (see also Xavier et al., 2023). What is perhaps key in the above quotes is the officers’ emphasis not on *forcing* people into treatment, but on placing them into a system that would *provide* them with wraparound support, including addiction treatment, health services (e.g., medication), mental health counselling, job/self-esteem training, and housing programs. The officers’ focuses were *not* on the treatment’s compulsoriness, but rather on the care system’s *integration*. They acknowledged vulnerable peoples’ challenges and sought to rectify them by imagining a facility that had accessible and available resources and services in one convenient location. Officers believed such a facility—and their role in facilitating uptake—would mitigate harmful impacts on vulnerable people while also reducing burdens on the criminal justice system

and its actors. It could achieve this via providing vulnerable people the opportunity to receive *successful* and robust treatment *initially* rather than fragmented care that may only serve to perpetuate distrust in the system, entrench stigmatization, and prolong unhoused persons' displacement (Cowan & Morgan, 2009; Herring, 2020; Sturman & Matheson, 2020).

Officers' fantasies of a facility that caters to vulnerable people's needs speaks to their desperation and need for the integration of law enforcement activities with health and social services. To be clear, they did not wish to be the primary care actor within this system. Ryan, in reference to mental health calls, clearly stated: "*I don't think I should be responding to it as the only one responding to it*" (Police Officer). Rather, many officers recognized how their actions were interconnected with other aspects of the care system. They wished all services within the care system—including law enforcement—would communicate and collaborate to develop improved, streamlined, and immediately available services that would facilitate easier access for vulnerable people, and allow officers to fulfill their role by connecting them to the resources they need (see also Marsden et al., 2020). Their proposal of such services extends beyond 'coercive care' to implore for consideration of the system as a *whole* (von Bertalanffy, 1968), advocating for non-punitive inter-agency collaboration that Baillergeau (2014) argues takes "recovery further than the mere reduction or control of symptoms, and towards supporting homeless people to regain control of their lives [...] as bearers of both duties and rights, worthy of being *admitted*" (p. 368, emphasis in original).

My data clearly illustrate that some officers believe they are ineffective *because* they feel they have been left to deal with this issue alone, with little support from social services. One police officer lamented: "*We seem to often be the only ones coming to the table to navigate this,*

with subtle inputs from Alberta Health Services, or fire, or mental health” (Colin). As Ian said in the beginning of the chapter:

*It’s almost come to a point where sometimes it feels like Edmonton Transit and the Edmonton Police Service are tasked with managing—if not trying to solve—homelessness, with infrastructure and resources that were meant for public transportation. You know, the stations are not shelters, they’re subway stations. The buses are not warming shelters, they are buses. [...] The biggest issues that I see with transit are that we’re trying to deal with these big societal issues of mental health and addiction and trauma, and at the end of the day, we’re a public transit system. (Ian, TPO)*

A public transit system and the actors that serve it, as several police officers and TPOs have asserted throughout this chapter, cannot sufficiently tackle the growing homelessness and overdose crisis alone. Participants described their inability to solve the root issues unhoused vulnerable people may be dealing with, such as mental health or addiction issues, without the support of services within the community. However, as the *24/7 unofficial component* of the care system, police and TPOs were often the ones transporting vulnerable people to the services that *could* help people deal with those root issues. When these services were not readily accepting nor accessible, this spurred officers’ frustration, as their presence/potential was not being maximized and their helping role could not be fulfilled. These findings suggest that prolonged frustration regarding officers’ inability to successfully complete some policing duties, especially in relation to people experiencing homeless or people who use drugs, may contribute to the adoption of and promote more conservative methods of dealing with vulnerable people (Christie et al., 1996), which could serve to undermine their goal of helping them and ensuring their well-being (Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2005; Morales et al., 2020; Robinson, 2019).

Despite some officers’ abject desire to help people off transit, they felt limited in what their law enforcement role could achieve as they are not an official actor within the care system. EPS and the City’s respective HELP and COTT units *are* an aspect of the formalized care



system, but they do not account for most patrol officers' perceptions and experiences. Additionally, these units are busy with their own caseloads, and their schedules may not permit them to be a reliable resource for patrol teams responding to various calls. As such, patrol officers *remain outside the official realm of the care system*—with few other options, they felt they could only temporarily displace people from transit spaces. Using displacement to deal with unhoused vulnerable people was not only an unhelpful—and potentially harmful—tactic for marginalized groups, but also for officers, who were frustrated by performing monotonous tasks every shift with no meaningful impact. Officers reported being overwhelmingly unsupported by the social services in Edmonton. Even though officers were perfectly placed to be part of the care system, they felt their presence and potential was being wasted, spurring intense feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and hopelessness. They desperately wished for improved integration of organizations, as they believed it would provide better care for vulnerable people and increase the usefulness of *their* role within the care system and the care system's reach and effectiveness, ultimately *meaningfully* helping our most vulnerable.

### *Conclusion*

Over the past several years, Edmonton transit stations have transformed into a *de facto* shelter space for unhoused and otherwise vulnerable community members. My data reveal police and peace officers did not blame vulnerable people for opting to stay on transit, as they acknowledged shelter locations were less desirable.

Many officers felt unable to provide or implement solutions for Edmonton's most marginalized, whether facilitating their access to housing programs or mental health and addiction treatment. They reported three significant challenges:

- 1) Officers felt that when they offered help and/or treatment resources, many vulnerable people continually refused them, and as such, officers believed they did not want help.
- 2) Social services were notoriously difficult for vulnerable people to access. Officers provided examples such as inconvenient operating hours, system inefficiencies, and the lack of services that were able to provide immediate care to someone in crisis. When vulnerable people could not access resources or treatment, police and TPOs felt like when vulnerable people *did* want help, officers had virtually no options to do so.
- 3) Many officers believed that since many unhoused vulnerable people are dealing with significant mental health issues, they were not in a place to better themselves and/or be continually successful in treatment, especially with some services' use of technology that vulnerable people may or may not have access to.

Despite unofficially tasked with managing—and at times, like Ian said—“*solving homelessness*,” police officers and TPOs are *not* a formal part of the care system. While some officers wished to do more to help those they frequently interacted with, they felt unable to do so with limited infrastructure and ability to refer vulnerable people to services that would actually provide the resources and/treatment they needed. The City and EPS' respective COTT and HELP units increased resources and time available to help vulnerable people on transit, yet they were often busy with their own caseload and could not always assist patrol officers, who did not have the same time and resources to help others afforded to them.

Due to patrol officers' disconnect from other elements in the care system, all police officers *and* TPOs felt able to do was displace vulnerable people from various areas in the transit system, a process they recognized was ineffective, contradicted their intentions/efforts to support people, and unhelpful for the vulnerable people themselves, who were constantly shuffled from

place to place. These factors combined left officers with *injured dignity* (Sennett & Cobb, 1973) and the distinct feeling of being left to deal with vulnerable people's homelessness and mental health and addiction issues in downtown and on transit without support from the broader system. To combat these negative feelings, some officers proposed developing an integrated care facility that would provide centralized and streamlined care for vulnerable people, regardless of whether they truly wanted the help. While the implementation of compulsory treatment could have negative impacts on the unhoused, officers expressing the need for one highlighted the intense frustration they felt when attempting to help vulnerable people within Edmonton's current care system and their desire for improved social services and enhanced system integration.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Police officers and TPOs, the law enforcement agents tasked with providing transit safety in Edmonton, experienced a *dual failure* in their official and unofficial policing duties, as they 1) felt unable to ensure a safe transit experience for passengers and 2) could not help vulnerable people find suitable alternatives to staying on transit property. Providing a systems view (von Bertalanffy, 1950), officers reported on their inability to provide safety and protection on transit due to limited authority allowed to them by their respective governing bodies and heightened negative public scrutiny. This left them unable to enforce proper behaviour. They also felt the criminal justice system was not providing sufficient consequences, especially for habitual violent offenders. Simultaneously, officers experienced a profound inability to improve vulnerable people's situations despite a clear desire to. Elements within the broader system (e.g., shelters, treatment centres, healthcare) were either inaccessible or unavailable, especially in crisis situations. Additionally, many vulnerable people deemed the services (especially the shelter) undesirable/inappropriate, which almost all officers agreed with. As such, many officers' offers to bring them to alternative spaces other than transit were met with outright refusals. In the words of Sennett & Cobb, officers "can be rebuffed only so many times before [they] find...it safer to act on emotionally neutral terms" (p. 233). Among police officers and TPOs, their dual failure fuelled feelings of defeat, futility, frustration, and cynicism.

These findings suggest the urgent and critical need for integration within and between various organizations and institutions to both support safety initiatives and provide support to vulnerable people. Law enforcement will likely always have a place within the care system, even if only to provide safety to service workers and enforce laws when necessary (Beaulieu, 2023; Xavier, 2023; Zakimi et al., 2022). Consistent with earlier research, officers neither want to be

the primary actor dealing with vulnerable people (Lane, 2019) nor do they feel effective when doing so (Butler, 2022; Xavier, 2023), highlighting officers' need and desire for increased collaboration between all elements within the criminal justice system, including law enforcement and social agencies. The Community Outreach Transit Team TPOs felt the most effective when dealing with vulnerable people on transit because they had the social service partnership, expertise, and time to truly help people, which contradicts other research arguing that law enforcement-outreach worker partnerships are fundamentally incompatible (Bar-On, 1995). The markers of a successful partnership between such agencies include set responsibilities, information and wisdom sharing, and a shared goal (Hudson & Hardy; 2002; Wildridge et al., 2004), all of which were present in COTT. Aligning the goals of law enforcement and social service agencies with a focus on improving public health could benefit law enforcement officers, as it may increase feelings of effectiveness, which this study exemplifies, as well as encourage compassion satisfaction and reduce turnover intention (Gomes et al., 2022). Under a public health approach, trauma professionals and people who use drugs may also benefit (Bucerus et al., 2023; Klose & Gordon, 2023). However, strides toward operationalizing such a framework should include the perspectives of vulnerable individuals to mitigate the potential production of new forms of securitization within the care system (Russell et al., 2022).

### *Limitations*

This work fills a critical gap in the Canadian literature, gathering police officers and transit peace officers' perceptions and experiences of policing transit. There are a few notable limitations. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, police officers and TPOs are two of three law enforcement agents who provide safety and security on transit. Including transit security officers in the study would not have been feasible due to the nature, scope, and timeline of this project.

Most police officers and TPOs identified as Caucasian and as such, this study may have missed salient nuances regarding race/ethnicity and differing experiences of policing transit.

Additionally, this study was cross-sectional and only gathered data during a single point in time. Transit safety—and the perception of transit safety—is dynamic and ever-changing, requiring officers to adapt to fluctuating circumstances. As such, these findings may not reflect the thoughts and experiences of all police officers and TPOs in Edmonton. Views from other police officers and peace officers in agencies across Canada may provide additional and varying insights.

I believe it is necessary to highlight that interviews took place between November and February, some of Edmonton's coldest months. Several officers expressed how winter months on transit were characterized by a higher workload, as vulnerable people would often seek shelter in the stations and centres during cold weather. It is possible that officers' heightened feelings at the time of data collection have influenced my data in way they may not have if I had interviewed them at a different point in the year. However, the experiences officers shared have provided rich insights into how they navigate (or fail to navigate) their official and unofficial duties during increased challenges.

#### *Directions for Future Research*

As this study focused on how law enforcement officers perceive and experience their role on Edmonton's transit system, it would be illuminating to gather data from vulnerable people who frequent transit spaces. They could provide additional insight into the realities of navigating various social services and potentially shed light on why transit may be a more desirable location to spend time as opposed to other places in the city. Their perspectives could be an important

piece to inform our understanding of both transit safety (e.g., perceptions/experiences of police/TPOs) and how the social system could be improved (e.g., mitigation of access barriers). The perspectives of other actors within the care system, such as social service or healthcare workers, would also be crucial to better understand the practices, policies, and agency intricacies that may pose barriers to vulnerable people's service access, as well as contribute to the conceptualization of the care system role for police officers and TPOs.

In response to a fatal stabbing on an Edmonton LRT platform, Canada's proposed bail reform law, Bill C-48, has received notable attention in Alberta (Johnson, 2023b; Ropchan, 2023). Should the bill be passed, it would establish new situations where a 'reverse onus' would apply in a bail hearing. For example, there would be an assumption that a person who has been accused of committing a violent offence, and who has previously been convicted of another violent offence within the last five years, would be detained, unless they can demonstrate to the court why they should be released (Government of Canada, 2023). Given how participants expressed considerable consternation over Alberta's current 'catch-and-release' bail system and its deleterious effects on transit safety, it would be pertinent to gather the perspectives of law enforcement officers after the bill's implementation to see if/how their experiences of ensuring safety on transit have changed.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Emails

### *Police Officer Recruitment Email*

Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in Collaborative Research Project on LRT

Dear EPS members,

My name is Rachel Geldart, and I am a Master's student at the University of Alberta. Recently, I have entered into a research agreement with the Edmonton Police Service and the City of Edmonton. This research project is titled "Challenges and Rewards of Helping Others: Experiences of Police and Peace Officers in Edmonton's Transit System" and has received ethics approval (ID #: Pro00120686). My supervisor is Dr. Marta-Marika Urbanik, who is a criminology professor in the Department of Sociology and a faculty member associated with the Centre for Criminological Research.

Considering the recent attention to safety on Edmonton's public transit, I am interested in talking to EPS officers (and peace officers) to learn about the experiences and challenges you face in policing in and around the LRT and bus stations. This will be an informal conversation about various topics including, but not limited to, your career path within EPS, your experiences of helping others in relation to public transit, and how you perceive the relationship between police officers and transit peace officers.

For this study, I am hoping to interview 15 EPS officers who are either directly involved with the policing or patrolling of public transit or have previously been involved with work related to the LRT or transit system.

The interviews will be strictly confidential, last 45-60 minutes (during your scheduled work hours), and with your consent, be audio-recorded. If you are interested, I will set up a conversation by phone, Zoom, or in person (whichever you prefer).

Please email me (the principal investigator) at [rgeldart@ualberta.ca](mailto:rgeldart@ualberta.ca) to set up the interview date, time, and preferred method of communication.

You can email me with any questions you may have, and I will be happy to answer them. Thank you very much and I am looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Rachel Geldart  
MA Student  
Department of Sociology, University of Alberta  
[rgeldart@ualberta.ca](mailto:rgeldart@ualberta.ca)

Dr. Marta-Marika Urbanik  
Supervisor  
Assistant Professor

Centre for Criminological Research, University of Alberta  
urbanik@ualberta.ca

*Transit Peace Officer Recruitment Email*

Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in Collaborative Research Project on LRT

Dear Transit Peace Officers,

My name is Rachel Geldart, and I am a Master's student at the University of Alberta. Recently, I entered into a research agreement with the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Police Service. This research project is titled "Challenges and Rewards of Helping Others: Experiences of Police and Peace Officers in Edmonton's Transit System" and has received ethics approval (ID #: Pro00120686). My supervisor is Dr. Marta-Marika Urbanik, who is a criminology professor in the Department of Sociology and a faculty member associated with the Centre for Criminological Research.

Considering the recent attention to safety on Edmonton's public transit, I am interested in talking to transit peace officers (and police officers) to learn about the experiences and challenges you face in policing in and around the LRT and bus stations. This will be an informal conversation about various topics including, but not limited to, your career path within ETS, your experiences of helping others in relation to public transit, and how you perceive the relationship between transit peace officers and police officers.

For this study, I am hoping to interview 15 transit peace officers who are either directly involved with the policing or patrolling of public transit or have previously been involved with work related to the LRT or transit system.

The interviews will be strictly confidential, last approximately 60 minutes (during your scheduled work hours), and with your consent, be audio-recorded. If you are interested, I will set up a conversation through Zoom or we can meet in person (whichever you prefer).

Please email me (the principal investigator) at rgeldart@ualberta.ca to set up the interview date, time, and preferred method of communication.

You can email me with any questions you may have, and I will be happy to answer them. Thank you very much and I am looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Rachel Geldart  
MA Student  
Department of Sociology, University of Alberta  
rgeldart@ualberta.ca

Dr. Marta-Marika Urbanik  
Supervisor

Assistant Professor  
Centre for Criminological Research, University of Alberta  
urbanik@ualberta.ca

## Appendix B: Interview Schedules

### *Police Officer Interview Schedule*

1. How long have you been a police officer?
2. Why did you want to become a police officer?
  - a. How do you think your motivations for joining are reflected in your day-to-day work as a police officer?
3. If someone close to you wanted to be a police officer, what would you say to them?
  - a. IF NEG: Why have you remained a police officer?
4. Could you tell me a bit more about your career path? [roles/areas, prior to and while a police officer (if relevant)]
  - a. What area did you enjoy most?
  - b. What area do you want to join? Why?
5. In your current role, could you describe what a day on the job looks like for you?
  - a. How has the LRT/ETS/transit affected your work?
6. What are some common safety and disorder issues with the LRT that you've heard about or experienced yourself?
  - a. Have these issues changed with COVID? How/why?
7. Who do you find yourself helping the most in relation to the LRT?
  - i. Public safety [however conceived]
  - ii. Public and Social disorder
  - iii. Victims of crime [victim offender overlap]
  - iv. "Harm reduction" approaches to policing
  - b. How is that help received? Do you think it's valued?
    - i. PROBE: how do passenger riders view police intervention? How does the vulnerable population view it?
8. Could you share a story of something you're proud of doing as a police officer? [probe about why this moment is proud]
  - a. Can you tell me about a time you helped someone in relation to the LRT?
9. What do you see as the biggest challenge when working in and around the LRT?<sup>4</sup>
  - a. Are there any policy constraints that impede working in and around the LRT?

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<sup>4</sup> While the interview schedules for police and transit peace officers are very similar, question 9, 9a), and 9b) were omitted from the interview schedule for TPOs at the request of a City of Edmonton lawyer. Despite the omission, almost all TPOs brought up policy constraints of their own volition.

- b. Recently, there was a bylaw change with regards to use and access of LRT stations. Has this affected your job and your ability to help? If so, how?
10. Has Project Connection affected your work? If so, how?
- a. PROBE: Have there been more or less or different teams in and around the LRT?
  - b. PROBE: Have you noticed a change in crime and disorder? How?
  - c. What can you tell me about your interactions with other EPS teams during Project Connection?
    - i. PROBE: What kind of resources are available when you're out on patrol?
    - ii. PROBE: Have you ever gotten support from other teams? Could you tell me more about that?
    - iii. PROBE: How do you communicate with other officers?
  - d. Overall, what worked well and what could be improved about how Project Connection was rolled out?
11. I've heard the EPS and ETS work closely in respect to transit safety. What do you think is working well, in this respect?
- a. What role do you think transit peace officers *should* play in ETS safety?
  - b. What role do they play in actuality?
  - c. How do you see the relationship between their role and your role as a police officer?
  - d. Do you think peace officers share that perception?
    - i. PROBE: Are there any challenges to this relationship?
    - ii. PROBE: What could be done to improve these relationships?
12. What are your thoughts on the recent media coverage that calls to make the LRT safer?
- a. How do you navigate pressure from the media given the restraints of policing?
  - b. How are you navigating pressures from the public? Especially considering the current conflicting perspectives related to city safety?
13. In your opinion, what can be done to make the LRT, or transit more generally, safer?
14. Is there anything you think I've missed in the questions I've asked you?
15. Do you know any other police officers who you think might be interested in participating in this study?

*Transit Peace Officer Interview Schedule*

- 1. How long have you been a peace officer?
- 2. Why did you want to become a peace officer?
  - a. How do you think your motivations for joining are reflected in your day-to-day work as a peace officer?

3. Could you describe what a day on the job looks like for you?
4. What are some common safety and disorder issues with the LRT that you've heard about or experienced yourself?
  - a. I've heard that LRT has changed pretty drastically over the years, is that something you've also experienced?
  - b. Have these issues changed with COVID? How/why?
5. Who do you find yourself helping the most in relation to the LRT?
  - i. Public safety [however conceived]
  - ii. Public and Social disorder
  - iii. Victims of crime [victim offender overlap]
  - iv. "Harm reduction" approaches to policing
  - b. How is that help received? Do you think it's valued?
    - i. PROBE: how do passenger riders view peace officer intervention? How does the vulnerable population view it?
6. Can you tell me about a time you helped someone in relation to the LRT?
  - a. Could you share a story of something you're proud of doing as a peace officer? [probe about why this moment is proud]
7. What do you see as the biggest challenge when working in and around the LRT?
8. Are you aware of Project Connection? Has it affected your work? If so, how?
  - a. Do you feel there is a need for more/fewer/different teams in and around the LRT?
  - b. Do you think there has been a change in crime and disorder? Why?
  - c. Have you had any interaction with EPS teams during Project Connection? What about other peace officer teams?
    - i. PROBE: What kind of resources are available when you're out on patrol?
    - ii. PROBE: Have you ever gotten support from other teams? Could you tell me more about that?
    - iii. PROBE: How do you communicate with other officers?
  - d. Overall, what worked well and what could be improved about how Project Connection was rolled out?
 

PROBE: perception about HSOC [EPS's Healthy Streets initiative]
9. I've heard that the City and EPS work closely in respect to transit safety. What do you think is working well, in this respect?
  - a. What role do you think police officers *should* play in ETS safety?
  - b. What role do they play in actuality?
  - c. How do you see the relationship between their role and your role as a peace officer?
  - d. Do you think police officers share that perception?
    - i. PROBE: Are there any challenges to this relationship?

ii. PROBE: What could be done to improve these relationships? [roles/approaches either ETS or EPS could implement]

12. What are your thoughts on the recent media coverage that calls to make the LRT safer?

a. How do you navigate pressure from the media?

b. How are you navigating pressures from the public given existing constraints to your job and the current conflicting perspectives related to city safety?

13. In your opinion, what can be done to make the LRT, or transit more generally, safer?

14. Is there anything you think I've missed in the questions I've asked you?

15. Do you know any other peace officers who you think might be interested in participating in this study?

## Appendix C: Interview Information Sheet

### Introduction Information for Interviews

Challenges and Rewards of Helping Others: Experiences of Police and Peace Officers in Edmonton's Transit System	
<b>Investigator:</b> Rachel Geldart, Sociology	<b>Supervisor:</b> Marta-Marika Urbanik, Sociology
<b>Address:</b> HM Tory Building, University of Alberta Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2H4	<b>Address:</b> HM Tory Building, University of Alberta Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2H4
<b>Email:</b> rgeldart@ualberta.ca	<b>Email:</b> urbanik@ualberta.ca

My name is Rachel Geldart and I'm a Master's student from the University of Alberta. I'm doing a study on peace officer experiences of working in or around the LRT and public transit (Ethics ID #: Pro00120686). The findings of this study will be used to provide knowledge and insight into the experiences of how police *and* peace officers help others in relation to the LRT while also navigating safety concerns. The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding of the potential challenges both officers face while patrolling public transit and surrounding areas. I hope that the information collected from this study will help to better understand how police and peace officers view their helping role, their experiences of policing public transit, and any challenges that impede their work. I believe that you may have some valuable knowledge about this topic, and I would greatly benefit from having your views shared for this project.

First of all, I want to thank you for talking to me. If you agree to participate in an interview, we will conduct an open-ended interview where I ask you general questions and you tell me as much or as little about the topic as you like. This interview would take place in a location of your choosing and your identity will never be recorded. The interview times would vary depending on how long you would like to talk with me and could range from 30 minutes to 2 hours, although the average interview length will likely be around an hour. All data that is collected from you will be encrypted. However, you are free to end the interview at any time. It is your choice whether you want to participate in these interviews or not, and you can change your mind at any time about this. Whether we are doing an interview, or just casually talking, you will be able to tell me as much or as little as you like about any topics we discuss. You will also have the chance to bring up topics that are important to you and that you would like me to know about. I am very interested in your experiences and perceptions of working in relation to the LRT. Please do not feel rushed or pressured to answer the questions. I have lots of time and I will sit and talk to you for as long as you'd like.

Before you decide about participation in my study, I want to tell you some very important points.

- 1) Your participation in an interview is **completely voluntary**. You don't have to participate if you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at any time without penalty. Also, you can



refuse to answer certain questions that you don't want to answer. You can stop the interview at any time to ask me questions, to take a washroom or drink break, or for any other reason. My goal is to have the interview feel more like a natural conversation rather than a formal discussion.

- 2) Even if you agree to be in the study today but change your mind later on, you can withdraw your information from my study up to two weeks following the interview, without penalty. You can call or email me within two weeks and I will delete your interview and any other information and not use it in my thesis research (this includes audio interviews, notes from conversations, fieldnotes and observations and anything else connected to you). My contact information is provided above. If you wish to withdraw your participation at any point after the initial two weeks, you may do so without penalty as long as I have not yet published anything related to your contribution in my study.
- 3) The information that you give me will be kept **completely confidential** and will be handled in compliance with the standards set out by the University of Alberta.
  - a. Your name will not be put on any of the material that I collect. Instead, I will give you a code name, or pseudonym, that only I will know. This way, nobody will ever be able to tell who you are except me.
  - b. While *voice recordings are not anonymous*, they will be de-identified as much as possible and no one will ever listen to them except for me.
  - c. If I decide to publish anything from our interview today, or use the information in a presentation, only your code name will appear. In other words, even if I know (or you tell me) your real name, I will never use it in anything that I publish or present.
  - d. The information that you provide is completely confidential. I will not give this information to other people. I will be the only person who has access to your information.
  - e. Data will be kept in a secure location for a minimum of 5 years following the completion of the research project. When appropriate, the information will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.
- 4) If you consent to being recorded for interview purposes, the information that is collected on tape will be transcribed after the interview is over and then the tape will be erased. The purpose of tape recording the interview is to make the process go a bit faster because I won't have to physically write down your answers. It will also help me record exactly what you say and how you say it, word for word. If we tape record this interview, to protect your privacy, I will ask you not to say your name while you are being recorded. Even if you don't want to be tape-recorded, I still invite you to be interviewed.
- 5) Aside from legal risks, by participating in my study you may also be exposed to psychological or emotional stress, particularly when discussing a past experience on the job that may have involved any violence or victimization. In addition, there is also the possibility that participating in this research may lead to a potential loss of social status in front of others.
- 6) There are multiple benefits of your participation in the study. Personally, you may find the experience of being able to discuss aspects of your work with an objective researcher as reflective and enjoyable. Additionally, your participation in the study may help guide policy

and practice changes in law enforcement. It is possible however, that there may not be direct benefits of participating in the interview.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at [reoffice@ualberta.ca](mailto:reoffice@ualberta.ca).

## Appendix D: Verbal Consent Form

Do you have any questions about the interview process before we begin?

Now, I'd like to keep a record that we talked about the research process and that you agree to participate in it. I will circle 'yes' or 'no' for the following questions and then sign my own name on this document. I won't write down your name or ask you to sign anything.

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you received and read the Information Form?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, and that your information will be withdrawn at your request?	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No
Do you agree to participate in the interview today?	Yes	No
May I tape-record the interview?	Yes	No

I, Rachel Geldart, have read the participant this form, offered them the opportunity to ask questions, and have answered any questions that they have asked.

Dated this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_.

Thanks for agreeing to participate in my study. Before this interview, you were given a consent form outlining the things we just talked about. As you saw, it described how your participation in the study is completely voluntary and that I will keep all of the information I collect completely confidential. My contact information is on that information sheet. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at any time.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at [reoffice@ualberta.ca](mailto:reoffice@ualberta.ca).

Let's begin today's interview.