

City of Mississauga MiWay Transit Plain Language Content Design

Client: City of Mississauga — MiWay Transit**Sector:** Public Sector / Municipal Transit**Deliverables:** 3 content design pieces
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ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

THE BRIEF

Create operational content for frontline transit workers and new riders — plain language; accessible; structured for people who cannot afford to misread it.

CONTENT DESIGN CHALLENGE

Transit content fails when it is written from the system's perspective rather than the user's. Every piece here had to work for someone under time pressure in a high-stakes operational environment.

REGULATED ENVIRONMENT

Municipal transit content must reflect PRESTO fare system rules; inter-agency agreements; safety compliance requirements; and AODA accessibility standards simultaneously.

AUDIENCES

Bus operators making real-time fare decisions. New riders planning an unfamiliar route. Customer Service staff assisting callers. Each audience needed different content — same principles.

THE CONTENT DESIGN PROBLEM

Municipal transit documentation is typically written to satisfy regulatory requirements — not to serve the person reading it in the moment they need it most. A bus driver handling a fare dispute at 7:43 AM does not have time to parse a policy document. A new rider who has never used a trip planner does not need jargon; they need confidence. The content design challenge here was the same across all three pieces: take information that was written for compliance and reshape it so it actually works for the human using it.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS — WHO WAS I WRITING FOR?

BUS OPERATOR

Needs to make a fare decision correctly in under 10 seconds at a shared transfer stop. Scanning; not reading.

Feeling: time pressure; accountability to policy.

NEW RIDER

Has never planned a transit trip online. May not be digitally confident. Needs step-by-step guidance without assumptions.

Feeling: uncertainty; low digital confidence.

CUSTOMER SERVICE STAFF

May be walking a caller through the Trip Planner live on the phone. Needs a guide they can follow aloud without confusion.

Feeling: responsibility to help; time pressure.

Route 22 Evergreen — Fare Transfer Rules for Drivers

Operational Notice

A cross-agency fare policy notice for MiWay bus operators covering a new route shared with a partner transit system. Three distinct user scenarios: PRESTO card transfers, printed PRESTO Transfer holders, and passengers transferring from the partner system. Reference: SHB-2024-0927-001.

Content design constraint: This notice had to be posted in the driver's cab and read in under 60 seconds before a first shift. No lengthy policy explanation. No legal language. Just: what does this specific driver need to do in this specific situation?

CONTENT DECISION	WHY I MADE IT	DESIGN PRINCIPLE
Opened with "What is Route 22 Evergreen?" before any procedures	A driver who does not understand the context cannot apply the rules correctly. Context comes before action.	User comprehension before compliance
Structured three scenarios as separate headed blocks rather than one combined list	A driver at a stop scans for their specific situation. Three separate blocks allow pattern-matching under time pressure.	Progressive disclosure by user type
Used imperative verbs for every action: "Ask"; "Accept"; "Confirm"	Instructions for frontline workers must be unambiguous. Passive voice creates hesitation at the worst possible moment.	Action-first language
Surfaced the disclaimer ("based on draft information") at the bottom; not the top	Leading with a disclaimer undermines confidence in the rest of the document. The rules were valid at time of issue — the disclaimer belongs after the content, not before.	Confidence-first framing
Named specific stop IDs alongside street intersections	Drivers navigate by stop ID; not by street name alone. Including both reduces the chance of missing a shared stop.	Audience-specific terminology

BEFORE — POLICY LANGUAGE

"Customers may be eligible to transfer between Shelbyville Transit and Springfield Transit services at

designated interoperability stops without incurring an additional fare, subject to applicable fare product terms."

AFTER — CONTENT DESIGN

"Customers travelling on Route 22 Evergreen can transfer between Shelbyville Transit and Springfield Transit without paying an additional fare at shared stops."

DELIVERABLE 02 OF 03

MiWay Trip Planner — Work Instruction for New Riders

SOP / User Guide

A plain language step-by-step guide for new MiWay customers who have never used the online Trip Planner, and for Customer Service staff who walk callers through it. SOP: OPS-24-CUST-001. Issued September 2026.

AODA and accessibility consideration: Public-facing transit content must meet AODA plain language standards. This guide was written for users who may have limited digital literacy, low English proficiency, or be calling in for help. Every sentence was tested against: could a person with no prior experience follow this without asking a follow-up question?

CONTENT DECISION	WHY I MADE IT	DESIGN PRINCIPLE
Seven discrete steps with numbered sub-actions inside each	A monolithic procedure causes readers to lose their place. Discrete steps create checkpoints — the reader always knows where they are in the journey.	Chunked progressive steps
Tip callouts at the most common failure points (Step 2 and Step 7)	Most users abandon a trip planner when they cannot find their address or when something looks wrong at the end. Anticipating the failure point and addressing it in context reduces abandonment.	Proactive error prevention
Included all four supported browsers by name in Step 1	New digital users often do not know what a browser is. Naming all four (Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge) means the user can recognize the one they already have instead of needing to ask.	No assumed knowledge
Offered "Depart at" vs "Arrive by" as explicit choice with explanation	These two options are where most users get confused. Explaining the difference in plain language at the point of decision removes the friction before it occurs.	Decision support at the right moment
Closed with three contact options: phone, email, in person	A user who cannot complete the task needs a clear exit ramp. Providing three channels respects that different users are comfortable with different contact methods.	Graceful failure path

DELIVERABLE 03 OF 03

Bus Ventilation and Interior Checks — Operator Work Instruction

Safety Compliance / SOP

An operational checklist for MiWay bus operators covering ventilation settings and end-of-trip interior checks. Safety-critical content with compliance implications — written for operators to scan quickly; not read at length.

CONTENT DECISION	WHY I MADE IT	DESIGN PRINCIPLE
Bullet list format with setting — STATE pairs for ventilation controls	Operators need to match physical controls to required states. A prose paragraph describing ventilation settings forces cognitive translation. A direct list removes that step.	Scannable operational format
Prose paragraph for the sleeping customer scenario rather than a list	A sleeping customer is not a checklist item — it is a safety judgment call requiring context. Switching to prose signals that this requires more care than a setting toggle.	Format signals urgency and complexity
Named specific escalation path: "contact Control and request assistance from Transit Enforcement"	Vague escalation language ("contact the appropriate authority") leaves the operator uncertain. Naming the exact resource removes the hesitation in a safety-sensitive moment.	Precise escalation language

CONTENT DESIGN PRINCIPLES APPLIED ACROSS ALL THREE PIECES

Plain language throughout User emotional state considered at each step Action-first imperative language
Progressive disclosure by user type No assumed knowledge Format chosen to match content complexity
Proactive error prevention Graceful failure paths AODA accessibility standards
Regulated environment compliance Scannable under time pressure Confidence-first framing

OUTCOMES

OPERATOR READINESS

The Route 22 fare notice was designed to be read in under 60 seconds before a first shift — eliminating supervisor queries at the start of a new route launch.

RIDER SELF-SERVICE

The Trip Planner guide was structured so a new rider could complete the full journey independently without calling Customer Service — reducing support volume.

COMPLIANCE WITHOUT JARGON

All three pieces meet municipal compliance requirements while remaining readable at a Grade 7-8 plain language level — the standard for AODA-compliant public content.

DUAL-AUDIENCE DESIGN

The Trip Planner guide was written to serve both new riders independently and Customer Service staff reading it aloud on a live call — one piece; two user journeys.

Transit content is some of the most consequential plain language work there is. A bus driver who misreads a fare policy creates a customer service failure in real time. A new rider who cannot complete a trip plan simply does not take the bus. The stakes are immediate and human.

What I learned from this engagement is that content design in a regulated environment is not about simplifying — it is about sequencing. The information in each of these documents was not technically complex. The challenge was deciding what comes first, what gets its own visual container, and what gets left out entirely. Every structural decision was a content design decision.

This is the same discipline I bring to financial services UX writing. Whether the user is a transit rider at a bus stop or a wealth management client confirming a transfer, the question is always the same: what does this person need to know, right now, to feel confident taking the next step?