



# *Toronto Police Service*

## *Policing the Toronto “Freedom Convoy”*

Institutional Report Submitted to the  
Public Order Emergency Commission

October 12, 2022

## Information Gathering and Collaboration

1. The Toronto Police Service leveraged information gathering and close collaboration to identify, mitigate and respond to the evolving tactics employed by convoy organizers.
2. Having early, continuous and accurate information related to the “Freedom Convoy” was instrumental in the Service’s planning for, and response to, the risks posed to Toronto. The Service implemented strategies and deployed resources that gave it the ability to collect information in real time, and to respond appropriately to emerging circumstances.
3. Among other things, the Service closely monitored the events in Ottawa using its internal intelligence capacity and external partnerships. It paid close attention to the activities of those engaged in the “Freedom Convoy”—both in the lead up to, and during, the occupation of Ottawa. The scope of the information landscape was far-reaching and unprecedented. Information and intelligence came from multiple sources and various locations. The Service managed those sources to produce actionable intelligence that could inform its operational planning for events in Toronto.
4. Even prior to February 2022, the Ontario Provincial Police (O.P.P.) were coordinating the sharing of intelligence information between partner agencies. When activities of those planning the “Freedom Convoy” came to light, it became the significant focus of what came to be known as Project Hendon. This O.P.P.-led

intelligence group provided all partner agencies with fulsome and timely intelligence updates on the activities of those involved in the “Freedom Convoy”.

5. Given the dynamic nature of the convoy, the Service’s information gathering operations developed an internal/external communication strategy with its partners that was tailored to the unique characteristics of this event, and could ensure it had timely information to be shared with decision makers.

6. Early on in the process of identifying risks and planning, the Service recognized the importance of collaboration. In anticipation of convoy activity affecting Toronto, the Service created and furthered partnerships with other agencies, including increased integration with federal, provincial and municipal law enforcement (and other) partners.

7. Among other things, the Service leveraged an existing working group of Ontario police agencies that have public order teams and resources. The purpose was to share information and collaborate on the public order response to risks as they materialized. This public order “hub” shared deployment information, operational trends and intelligence based on the events and circumstances unfolding throughout Ontario and across Canada. It also shared public order resources across the province based on emerging intelligence. The “hub” divided the province by territory and assigned public order teams to those areas for a crowd management response, if required. Ottawa was the primary focus steering “hub” resources and intelligence, but this collaboration ensured an appropriate police response to “Freedom Convoy” activity that might surface in other jurisdictions across the province.

8. The plan contemplated and required considerable coordination with the City of Toronto and significant deployment of City personnel and assets. Among other things, the Service managed roadways and re-directed traffic to minimize disruption and prevent an occupation that would disrupt critical and essential public services. This alone required coordinated planning with the City and the coordinated deployment of municipal assets and personnel. Several City officials, offices and divisions were involved in preparations and planning, including the City Manager’s Office, the City’s Emergency Operations Centre, Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Paramedic Services, Toronto Corporate Communications and the Mayor’s Office. In order to facilitate this coordination, the Service initiated an Executive Management Table, which brought together the various coordinating entities in place.

9. When it became apparent that elements of the “Freedom Convoy” would, in fact, attempt a vehicle occupation at Queen’s Park in Toronto, members of TPS Command and senior leaders at Emergency Management and Public Order (“EMPO”, a specialized TPS unit) reached out to the Metropolitan Police in London, United Kingdom to discuss how they have managed similar events. Recognizing the differing legal and constitutional frameworks of our two countries, MET Commanders provided information that assisted us. Specifically, they recommended that the Service, through the Chief and supported by the Mayor, appear prominently in the public before any event to make clear what would and would not be allowed to occur in the city. This was done by way of a news conference where both the Chief and Mayor addressed the media. It had a positive impact on several fronts. It reassured the people of Toronto, it set clear boundaries for those intent on protesting and it set the tone for police officers who would

be assigned front line duties to ensure lawful protest was still permitted to occur.

Importantly, it also demonstrated public support, through their political representatives, for the proposed policing operation.

### **Anticipating a Toronto “Freedom Convoy”**

10. The Service’s information gathering efforts allowed it to understand and predict how and when the events occurring elsewhere in the country might radiate to Toronto. It is through these investigative efforts that the Service discovered the events planned for Toronto on February 5 and 12, 2022. Through these investigative efforts, the Service also became attuned to the risks posed by the convoy of disruption of critical public services, which were primarily centred in the downtown core of Toronto.

11. On February 1, 2022, TPS Intelligence Services issued an event notification in relation to a “Convoy for Freedom Toronto 2022”. The potential risks to Toronto had crystallized. The Chief therefore determined that the “Freedom Convoy” had become a “critical point” for Toronto. The Service, in consultation with the Board, ensured that the Board was properly informed on the impending events and the proposed police response. This allowed for an effective and proper information exchange to enable the Board to fulfil its statutory governance and oversight functions, while ensuring that the Chief directed all policing operations. This collaboration played an important part in the successful governance of this major event and is covered in greater detail in the Board's report.

### *Operational Planning*

12. The Service began operational planning once it became clear that there were plans to replicate the events in Ottawa in other parts of Ontario, including Toronto.

13. The Service learned that convoys from multiple locations were planning to converge on Toronto on February 5, 2022. Among other things, posters were circulating online about a “Convoy for Freedom Toronto” and calling for a “Saturday February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 10am, cruise to Queens Park”. There was clear indication that participants in the Ottawa “Freedom Convoy” and/or fresh organizers and supporters planned to replicate the Ottawa protests, blockades and occupations in the City of Toronto. Knowing the risks to the City, the Service planned and deployed accordingly.

14. On Wednesday, February 3, 2022, EMPO began writing a plan to protect critical services that the public depends on. EMPO is a specialized unit within the Toronto Police Service that authors plans to manage major events and emergencies—most often events or emergencies that affect the City as a whole and require a Service-wide response. In this case, EMPO produced a plan that was multi-faceted and scalable to address the many risks being identified through intelligence and other means.

15. The plan’s major points of emphasis were:

- a. Identifying and securing strategic or key infrastructure sites in the downtown core, including but not limited to: Hospital Row, Queen’s Park, City Hall, courthouses and Toronto Police Headquarters.

- b. Creating a strategic traffic plan which sought to direct convoy vehicles to perimeter positions where resources were staged to deal with them. This included strategically regulating traffic to protect critical services and sites.
- c. A communication plan was created to ensure the public and key stakeholders (e.g. hospital administration, government officials, etc.) were made aware of the police operation in the downtown core. Among other things, the Service leveraged social media, traditional media outlets and even large electronic message boards located at key locations. The Service was very clear in its messaging with respect to its regulation of traffic.
- d. Facilitating peaceful and safe protest at likely demonstration sites.
- e. Being ready to immediately identify and safely remove tents or other structures.
- f. Staging vehicle towing assets throughout the perimeter area as a visual and actual deterrent.
- g. Developing a strategy to support the Toronto Fire Service in its enforcement of the *Fire Protection and Prevention Act* and to address the risks posed by the use of incendiary materials, including gasoline carried in “jerry cans” or other containers.

16. In addition to leveraging the public order “hub” described above, the Service also collaborated closely with neighbouring police services to develop region-specific and risk-specific plans, as required. This included the Durham, York and Peel Regional Police Services, as well as the Ontario Provincial Police. Among other things, the police services collectively agreed to assist each other with business continuity by helping to respond to priority non-convoy-related calls in the event any one of the services could not respond in a timely manner. Among the risk-specific plans developed through this regional collaboration were contingency plans in the event of an attack on, or disruption of, shared or critical services in the Greater Toronto Area and beyond.

### *Implementation*

17. Upon approval of the finalized plan, EMPO assisted in its operationalization.

18. The Service also activated its Major Incident Command Centre to facilitate the plan’s implementation, secure command and coordination for the duration of the event and ensure the safety of those involved in protests, Service members and the wider community.

19. Implementing the Service’s plan was a substantial task that took a significant amount of time and resources. All areas of the Service were affected by its implementation. The impact was such that some units had to pause ongoing investigations in order to meet the critical resource needs of the plan.



20. Despite the considerable resource demands of its operational plan, the Service determined that there was no need for additional frontline resources to police Toronto during the “Freedom Convoy”. Instead, leveraging existing and regular collaboration with other services in Ontario and the public order “hub” discussed above, the Service proposed, and the Board agreed, to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with neighbouring police services boards / police services to provide reciprocal public order support to supplement existing internal public order capacity. On that basis, public order teams from the police services of Waterloo and Hamilton were detailed to assist the Service during the Toronto “Freedom Convoy”.

### **The Toronto “Freedom Convoy”: February 5, 9 and 12, 2022**

21. As expected, on February 5, 2022, convoys from multiple locations converged on the City of Toronto.

22. Planned traffic redirection and management that day prevented convoy vehicles from reaching their planned destinations in front of and around Queen’s Park, and avoided the unlawful occupation of transportation infrastructure and/or the disruption of critical public services in Toronto.

23. Traffic management and redirection was carried out at strategic points on major inbound highways. This included the southbound Don Valley Parkway and the eastbound Gardiner Expressway. There was also traffic management on local roads to protect key public services in and around Queen’s Park from any extreme disruption caused by, among other things, the occupation of key areas by convoy vehicles. The

traffic management on that day also involved coordination with public transit partners to prevent any serious disruption of public transportation.

24. The overall disruption to transportation and other critical infrastructure in Toronto on February 5, 2022 was limited. In particular, the Service and its City of Toronto partners were successful in maintaining unobstructed access to Hospital Row for hospital personnel, as well as patients and their visitors.

25. Several large trucks and pickup trucks nonetheless managed to obstruct the intersection of Avenue Road and Bloor Street West. This occurred some distance from critical public service locations and resulted in limited disruption.

26. While convoy vehicles were prevented from causing large-scale disruption, blocking access to critical services or occupying transportation and other infrastructure, the supporters of the “Freedom Convoy” were not prevented from exercising their freedom of expression and right to assembly. There were several convoy-related demonstrations within the City, including counter-protests and a protest by The Line Canada, a pre-convoy protest group that arose in response to the pandemic and held regular marches in Toronto during the two years prior to the convoy. The Service’s focus was to facilitate everyone’s right to assemble and express themselves, while keeping the peace and avoiding the unlawful disruptions visited upon Ottawa and other places.

27. The protests that took place during this particular period of heightened risk were peaceful. There were no injuries to police or the public. There were also no reported incidents of hate crimes or terrorism during the event.

28. Following a day of demonstrations, the Service assisted convoy participants with maneuvering their large vehicles and leaving the city peacefully. The intersection of Avenue Road and Bloor Street West was reopened to vehicular traffic and pedestrians around 9:00 p.m.

29. On February 9, 2022, a few days after the Toronto “Freedom Convoy” of February 5, 2022, a prominent leader of the Ottawa “Freedom Convoy”, Chris Barber, posted a TikTok video suggesting that its leaders and followers would converge on Toronto. As a result of this post, the Service took pre-emptive action to secure critical public services in accordance with existing operational plans. Although this video proved to be a ruse to mislead police, the actions to secure public services were measured, sensible and ultimately adjusted based on emerging information and unfolding circumstances.

30. The Service thereafter learned that Toronto’s downtown core would be targeted by a convoy on Saturday, February 12, 2022.

31. Given the progression of events in Ottawa, Windsor (where the Ambassador Bridge was then blockaded) and elsewhere, the Service developed and implemented a scalable plan to promote public safety and maintain access to the downtown core with controlled access to certain parts of University Avenue. Traffic management and re-

routing was again planned. The plan was designed to be quickly implemented and was supported by barricades, TC54 barrels, variable message signage boards, heavy vehicle trucks and TTC event buses staged at key locations. Officers were also strategically positioned near critical public facilities for immediate deployment when required and a surge capacity was built into the operations.

32. As with the convoy of February 5, 2022, the Service's operational planning and its implementation resulted in limited, if any, disruption on February 11-12, 2022 of key municipal services and other critical public services, while permitting lawful protest.

33. Throughout the entire operation, the Chief and Service provided real-time information to the Board's Executive Director and Chief of Staff, so that the Board as a whole could be kept apprised of any developments, have an appreciation for how the plan was being implemented by the Chief, and be prepared to engage in any further governance actions if they became necessary. The approach to the “information exchange” with the Board is further expanded upon in the Board's report to the Commission (dated October 12, 2022).

34. The success of TPS operations surrounding these events was based largely on allowing those with the training, expertise and experience to perform their duties unimpeded. While the Chief and senior Command approved the operational plans and had ultimate oversight of all policing operations, they empowered the “Freedom Convoy” Incident Commander and team to execute the plan and to make operational decisions as events unfolded. Ongoing media updates were provided at executive-level

ranks, but operational decision-making was left to those equipped with this specialized skillset.