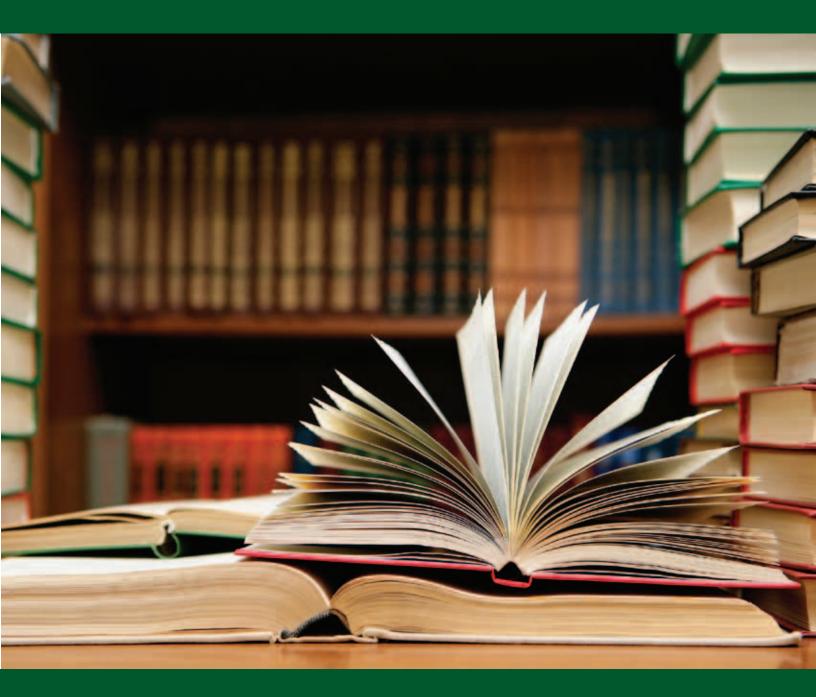# RESEARCH NOTE SERIES: CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS ARRESTED ON OUTSTANDING WARRANTS BY BC TRANSIT POLICE OFFICERS

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Introduction

The purpose of this research note is to describe the population of individuals arrested by BC Transit Police officers on outstanding warrants. This analysis is based on the 606 arrests for outstanding warrants made by BC Transit Police officers in 2011. Of these 606 arrests, 72% were as a result of officers simply doing fare checks, while the others were primarily because of officers responding to crime and disorder issues on and around the BC SkyTrain system. Of note, the 606 individuals arrested were associated to 747 outstanding warrants. To put this into context, 80% of the arrests were associated a single outstanding warrant, 16% were associated to two warrants, 3% were associated to three, and 1% were associated to arrestees who had four outstanding warrants. The data derived from an anonymized dataset extracted from the PRIME system and on an RCMP case-matched and anonymized CPIC criminal history search. That search revealed that 60% of those arrested already had a criminal conviction for at least one offence at the time of their arrest on the outstanding warrant. This report focuses primarily on that 60% of arrestees, which resulted in 359 individuals.

The Warrants

As demonstrated in Table 1, there was a wide range of charges or violations associated to the warrants. In general, the largest proportions of warrants were the result of offender non-compliance, property offences, and violent offences. Moreover, most of the offences were associated to jurisdictions in the Lower Mainland. In fact, less than 1% was associated to jurisdictions outside of British Columbia.

Table 1: Nature of Outstanding Warrants (N = 747)

Nature of Charge or Violation	
Theft	22%
Breach	19%
Failure to Comply/DNA Order	9%
Assault	8%
Drug Offences	5%
Fraud	5%
Break and Enter	5%
City Bylaws	3%
Mischief	3%
Failure to Appear	3%
Threats or Fear Personal Injury	3%
Mental Health Act	3%
Driving While Prohibited	2%
Sex Offences	2%
Robbery	2%
Obstruction of Justice	2%
Immigration Act	1%
Other Offences, such as Attempted Murder, Forcible Confinement, or Kidnapping	4%

Notably, there was also a general equal distribution of where and when individuals were arrested by BC Transit Police officers on outstanding warrants. For example, the arrests are equally distributed across months of the year, day of the week, hour of the day, and across SkyTrain station locations. This should not be surprising given that most of these arrests were, as mentioned above, the result of fare checks, which presumably are carried out in a manner that ensures relatively equal numbers of checks across time, place, and officer scheduling and deployment.

The Offenders

As with most criminal populations in British Columbia, the vast majority of offenders arrested on outstanding warrants were male (85 per cent) and, on average, 35 years old with a range of 13 to 71 years old. Less than 4% were young offenders and only two offenders were national parolees. Moreover, as a group of offenders, those with more than one prior conviction were likely to meet the definition of a prolific offender and one-quarter met the criteria for super prolific. As demonstrated in Table 2, in this sample, the average offender with a criminal history had, on average, a 14-year criminal history with 21 prior convictions. The aforementioned super prolific offenders had, on average, a 22-year criminal history with 53 prior convictions.

Table 2: Criminal Histories of Offenders (N = 359)

Category of Offender	% of Total Group of Offenders	Avg. Length of Criminal History in Years	Avg. # of Convictions on Record
Non-Prolific (1 – 9 Convictions)	41%	7	4
Prolific (10 – 29 Convictions)	35%	15	18
Super Prolific (30 or More Convictions)	25%	22	53
All Offenders in Sample	100%	14	21

As demonstrated in Table 3, the more prolific the offender, the more criminally diversified they were. In other words, in addition to more offences and more convictions, the more prolific the offender was, the more variety there was in their offending. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 4, the more prolific the offender was, the earlier they began their criminal careers and the faster their rate of reoffending when controlling for their time not incarcerated. In effect, over time, prolific offenders offend at least three times faster than non-prolific offenders, and super prolific offenders offend at least eight times faster than non-prolific offenders.

Table 3: Breadth of Criminal Histories of Offenders (N = 359)

Category of Offender	% with Property Crime Convictions	% with Convictions for Violence	% with Convictions for Drugs	% with Convictions for Non-Compliance
Non-Prolific (1 – 9 Convictions)	53% (1)	37% (1)	23% (<1)	50% (1)
Prolific (10 – 29 Convictions)	98% (7)	69% (2)	59% (2)	94% (5)
Super Prolific (30 or More Convictions)	100% (24)	90% (6)	72% (3)	99% (14)
All Offenders in Sample	80% (9)	61% (3)	47% (2)	78% (5)

Average number of convictions in brackets

Table 4: Selected Characteristics of Offenders (N = 359)

Category of Offender	Avg. Age	Avg. Age at 1st Conviction	Avg. # of Jurisdictions on Record	Rate of Conviction Based on Free Time
Non-Prolific (1 – 9 Convictions)	30 years old	23 years old	2	1 per 2 ½ years
Prolific (10 – 29 Convictions)	36 years old	21 years old	4	1 per 9 months
Super Prolific (30 or More Convictions)	40 years old	18 years old	6	1 per 3 ½ months
All Offenders in Sample	35 years old	21 years old	4	1 per 17 months

Conclusion

While the 606 offenders arrested as a result of an outstanding warrant by BC Transit Police officers in 2011 represents only a tiny fraction of the total population of SkyTrain commuters over that period of time, this research note highlights several important issues for consideration. In the process of performing their primary responsibilities of maintaining the safety and security of those on and around SkyTrains and SkyTrain stations, BC Transit Police officers were able to arrest over 600 offenders for outstanding warrants that might not have been apprehended otherwise. Importantly, these arrests were made without increasing the number of BC Transit Police officers, the resources allocated to this service, or changing the primary duty of the transit police in any way. Instead, these offenders came to BC Transit Police officers' attention primarily as a result of a routine fare check. The unintended result of apprehending offenders with outstanding warrants in this way can be viewed as an extremely beneficial additional outcome of having officers dedicated to enforcing the rules and procedures associated with the SkyTrain system.

This outcome is even more exciting when one considers the profile of those arrests by BC Transit Police officers because of an outstanding warrant. For the most part, these individuals were highly recidivist, serious, chronic offenders who were at-large in the community. It is precisely this population of offenders who are responsible for a disproportionally large amount of crime in British Columbia and, therefore, of greatest concern to the public and the police. With the public concern over police budgets and the subsequent strain on police resources, it would appear that, in addition to its primary mandate, BC Transit Police officers are contributing to the broader goals of reducing crime and increase public safety by successfully identifying and arresting serious and prolific offenders.