

OTTAWA TRANSIT RIDERS

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



November 16, 2021

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INTRODUCTION

- This is the second Annual Report of the Ottawa Transit Riders (OTR).
- It was prepared for the 2021 Annual General Meeting (AGM) scheduled for November 16, 2021.
- This report will give a short overview of the group’s background, as well as 2020- 21 outreach, events attended, activities, and tentative next steps for the incoming board.
- The 2020- 21 board members were:
 - Chris Hansen
 - Henry Paikin (resigned spring 2021 to attend school in the United Kingdom)
 - John Redins
 - Kari Glynes Elliott
 - Laura Shantz
 - Sally Thomas
 - Sam Boswell
 - Stuart MacKay

BACKGROUND

- Ottawa Transit Riders was founded in April 2019. We held elections and created a nine-person board. One seat on our board is reserved for a member who uses ParaTranspo.
- We are a non-partisan, membership-based, advocacy group, working to make Ottawa’s transit system more *affordable, reliable, accessible, and safe* for users.
- We see ourselves as the “voice of transit riders in Ottawa”.
- The first AGM was held in August 2020 and an eight-member new board was acclaimed at that time. No elections were needed as we received only eight applications.
- Since the founding meeting, OTR has worked on developing the group’s infrastructure, including committees, an OTR Code of Conduct, an OTR NationBuilder account and website, the building of membership data, mailing lists, and improving the group’s social media presence.
- Ottawa’s Light Rail Transit (LRT) system has faced multiple challenges since its launch, which has also consumed much of the group’s attention. OTR has an official position of wanting greater transparency around the train and more details about options to improve the situation.

ONLINE PRESENCE

- [Twitter](#) (4,620 followers).
- [Facebook](#) (834 followers).
- [Instagram](#) (294 followers).
- Active [website](#).
- Many media interviews (TV, radio, internet, podcasts, and print) on Ottawa transit.

CAMPAIGNS OVERVIEW

#Fight4FairFares / #FairFares / Flatten the Fares

- This was a campaign initially intended to halt the planned City of Ottawa budget 2020 fare increase. Through OTR's efforts, the City temporarily froze transit fares from January to the end of March 2020 (the freeze was subsequently extended due to COVID-19).
- Sadly, we lost a vote in November 2020 when councillors decided to continue with planned fare increases.
- This campaign is expected to be rebooted to push back against the City's plan to increase transit fares again in January 2022.

#KeepTransitMoving

- As part of our advocacy efforts, OTR continued to support the #KeepTransitMoving campaign.
- With public transit ridership plummeting during the COVID-19 pandemic, OTR had worked with transit advocacy groups from across the country, including the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), TTCRiders, Trajectoire Québec, London Transit Riders Alliance, Free Transit Edmonton and other to advocacy for emergency operational funding for transit from the federal government.
- Our advocacy was essential in the implementation of the Safe Restart Funding Agreement in the summer of 2020, which saw the City of Ottawa receive nearly \$75 million to offset the funding deficit caused by the decline in ridership.
- As the pandemic continued, into fall 2020, we advocated for ongoing emergency funding, participating in a digital rally to #KeepTransitMoving in December 2020.
- With the Safe Restart Funding Agreement set to expire at the end of March 2021, OTR and the #KeepTransitMoving coalition urged the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, the Minister of Finance, to renew the Safe Restart Agreement and continue to fund public transit. You can read our letter here: <https://www.keeptransitmoving.ca/letter-to-finance-minister>
- In addition to the formal letter to Minister Freeland, OTR sent out press releases and pushed the renewal of the funding agreement at the local level.
- As we continued to advocate for emergency funding, OTR and the #KeepTransitMoving coalition felt the need to formalize the relationship. By the summer of 2021, we had launched as the [Keep Transit Moving Coalition / Coalition pour le transport collectif canadien](#).
- This relationship with transit advocacy groups, labour, environmental groups, and others will be essential in making sure that transit riders in Ottawa have a voice on the provincial and national stage.



**Keep Transit
Moving Coalition**
coalition pour le transport
collectif canadien
www.keeptransitmoving.ca

#Vote Transit 2021

- With a federal election in 2021, OTR teamed up again with the Keep Transit Moving Coalition to put pressure on political parties to commit to dedicated operational funding for public transit in their party platform.
- Along with our Keep Transit Moving partners, OTR helped sponsor a Transit Town Hall streamed via Facebook Live, with Jonathan Wilkenson (Liberal), Elizabeth May (Green), and Avi Lewis (NDP) all participated.
- While public transit issues remained off the radar for many of federal parties, the lessons learned from #VoteTransit2021 can be applied to the upcoming provincial and municipal elections in 2022.



#ParaParity

- ParaParity continues to be a priority for OTR.
- OTR has been advocating for ParaParity to have a spot at the table (and on the agenda) at all Transit Commission meetings. Including people with disabilities who use the transit system is crucial to achieving true transit equity.
- We are also advocating for service changes in ParaTranspo, including the provision of service for customers from 12:00- 6:00 A.M, which would give Para users the freedom to take on more jobs and lighten the load on paramedic services (which are often used to get people home from the hospital in the middle of the night).
- We have also been informing the work of the Para Transpo Customer Service Working Group, formed by OC Transpo to get feedback on developing a webform for booking and cancelling rides. The goal is to develop this online form into an app similar to what is used by companies like Uber.
- And, as the LRT continues to take the spotlight, we want to ensure that ParaTranspo is kept on the city's radar; there is more to transit than merely the train!
- Some of the other ongoing LRT issues also point to the urgency to develop a contingency plan that gets everyone to safety, no matter their ability (e.g. a well-thought-out evacuation plan).

Light Rail Transit (LRT)

- OTR has been vocal about the importance of having an operational LRT system. As reported in OTR's 2020 Annual Report, there is still no firm timeline on when the system will be fully operational and users often must rely on supplemental bus service (R1).

- There are ongoing capacity issues with the R1 replacement bus service and OTR will continue to fight for adequate bus service and better communication on cancelled/delayed routes.
- There are also new issues related to LRT safety, transparency around damage to trains and tracks, and ongoing legal challenges. OTR has been (and will continue to be) vocal about the need for a formal review of LRT Stage One as well as LRT Stage Two.
- We want consultations on the transit stations that are being built to ensure that they meet users' needs, especially regarding accessibility.

Transit Commission Meetings

- Board members have attended every Transit Commission meeting held since the founding of the organization, including every meeting held in 2020- 21.
- Board members and supporters have been delegates at many meetings, speaking on a range of issues from ParaTranspo, LRT safety issues, and fare increases. We frequently submit written documents so that our demands are part of the public record.

2020- 21 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- OTR supported the #ParaParity campaign that pushed OC Transpo to launch an online booking system for customers of ParaTranspo. We are waiting to hear about an app (similar to Uber) that will tell users where their Para bus is.
- We ran a "Para Awareness Week" to inform people in Ottawa of the challenges faced by regular users of ParaTranspo
- We have supported Free Transit Ottawa's campaign for OC Transpo to provide free passes to low income residents, such as those on Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).
- We have worked with allies at Horizon Ottawa, Ecology Ottawa, Free Transit Ottawa, and others on affordable housing and transit-related issues:
 - We support Councillor McKenney's campaign to have a judicial inquiry investigate the LRT.
 - We participated in a rally in August to demand an emergency meeting on the LRT when it derailed (it derailed again AFTER the rally).
- In the spring, we ran a competition for Ottawa's worst bus stop – there were many candidates!
- At the end of 2020, we ran a series of profiles on people who use transit and why raising fares is such a negative policy choice (Flatten the Fares).
- We advised members of various detours through Vanier and changes to STO buses downtown.
- We provided advice and speaking notes for people who want to speak as delegates to city council meetings, especially transit commission meetings.
- OTR hosted a webinar in October 2020 called "From #Autowa to Healthy Streets: A Webinar with Lucy Saunders."
- OTR became a founding member of the Keep Transit Moving Coalition, a pan-Canadian advocacy group composed of transit advocates, labour organizations, environmental groups, and others.

OUTREACH AND MEDIA

- Despite the lockdown, OTR continued to advocate for improvements to public transit, better communication from OC Transpo and the City of Ottawa, and more accountability and transparency from OC Transpo and the City of Ottawa.
- The group continues to support the work of allies such as Healthy Transportation Coalition, Ecology Ottawa, Free Transit Ottawa, Horizon Ottawa, Courage Ottawa, and other advocacy groups with shared goals.
- Board members have been attending joint meetings on the COVID-19 pandemic, transit planning, the upcoming 2022 City of Ottawa budget, and more.
- Members of the Ottawa Transit Riders are regularly interviewed on transit issues by a number of media: the Globe and Mail, CTV News, CBC (radio, TV, and print), CFRA, the Ottawa Citizen, Centretown News, Capital Current, the Glebe Report, and others.
- Board members have spoken at public rallies on the LRT and at events sponsored by allies such as at the “Organizing to win the city” event held in October 2021.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION IN 2021

- Balance January 1, 2021 **\$2608.76**
- Balance November 10, 2021 **\$2598.95**
- Received **\$363.19** in donations / membership fees
- Spent **\$373** on NationBuilder website annual fee
- Approved, but not yet withdrawn **\$87.64**
 - Ottawa Transit Riders domain name (\$19.21)
 - Posters, printing (\$68.43)

MOVING FORWARD

- Moving forward, we are hoping to channel enthusiasm from our members to fight for better transit on several fronts: R1 replacement buses, LRT, and ParaTranspo.
- We will be continuing to support the #KeepTransitMoving campaign and issues related to transit in the “new normal” pandemic world.
- The #TransitChallenge, where we ask councillors and key OC Transpo staff to rely on transit for one week in February, was cancelled in 2021 due to the pandemic but will be resurrected in 2022.
- Municipal and provincial elections are coming in 2022.

Do you have issues? Concerns? Pet peeves? Please join us!

https://www.ottawatransitriders.ca/otr_membership

