


Transit Challenge 2020

Ottawa Transit Riders, Free Transit Ottawa, Ecology Ottawa, and Healthy Transportation Coalition



FREE _____
TRANSIT - - - -
OTTAWA _____

**Healthy Transportation
Coalition** 
pour les transports sains



Why the Transit Week Challenge?

In 2019, Free Transit Ottawa organized a Transit Week Challenge that took place from Monday, February 4th to February 10th 2019 as a way to bring focus to transit issues within the city.

Councillors were invited to rely on transit for one week – to experience the city the way many people in Ottawa already do every day. Participants were encouraged to ride transit to and from work, to shopping, to appointments, and to social events. The Challenge represented the daily reality of Ottawa’s transit dependent residents: students, commuters, low income bus riders, and others without access to vehicles.

2020

The *second* annual Transit challenge took place from Monday, February 17 to Sunday, February 23, 2020. It was organized by the Ottawa Transit Riders, Healthy Transportation Coalition, Ecology Ottawa, and Free Transit Ottawa.

We also reached out to fellow transit advocates in other cities and were delighted that Edmonton decided to conduct a similar challenge.

What was the difference between Transit Challenge 2019 and 2020?

- Launch of the LRT
- Expanded number of people invited (reached out to city managers and OC Transpo executives)
- Tracked participation, not just agreement
- Two surveys
- Report released quickly after end of challenge



Participants

Most councillors agreed to participate. More than 100 other people also sent RSVPs. Those listed in bold are members of the Transit Commission

Active Participants	Non-Participants
Mathieu Fleury	Eli El-Chantiry
Matthew Luloff	Rick Chiarelli (on leave)
Carol Anne Meehan	George Darouze
Jan Harder	Scott Moffat
Jenna Sudds	Stephen Blais
Tim Tierney	Laura Dudas (on vacation)
Keith Egli	Diane Deans (on leave)
Glen Gower	Michael Olsen (on vacation)
Theresa Kavanagh	Jim Watson (mayor)*
Rawlson King	
Catherine McKenney	
Jeff Leiper	
Riley Brockington	
Shawn Menard	
Jean Cloutier (vice chair)	
Allen Hubley (chair)	
Leah Williams (citizen commissioner)	
Sarah Wright-Gilbert (citizen commissioner)	
Anthony Carricato (citizen commissioner)	

* Mayor Watson did not officially participate in Transit Challenge 2020 but did tweet from public transit with the hashtag several times during the week in what we understand to be a supportive acknowledgement of the event.

Other high profile participants included Joel Harden (Ottawa Centre Federal MP), Pat Scrimgeour (OC Transpo), Andrew West (Orleans by-election Green Party candidate), Ben Koczwarski (Ottawa-Vanier by-election Green Party candidate), and Lucille Collard (Ottawa Vanier by-election Liberal Party candidate).



Amusingly we also heard from supporters who happened to be in other cities. They documented their experience, sometimes comparing systems.

But DC is the clear winner on convenient purchase. Paid with credit card. Score is 6-0 #TransitChallenge2020



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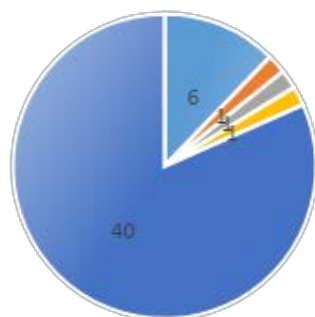
Am I doing this right? #TransitChallenge2020



7:23 AM · Feb 18, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Results from the mid-week survey

How many people in each category responded to survey?



Participants

- city councillor
- OC Transpo employee
- city of Ottawa employee
- Federal MP
- public

Turnout from councillors was quite good. However, it was discouraging that so few decision-makers from the city of Ottawa or OC Transpo took the challenge. It would have been quite meaningful if City manager Steve Kanellakos and transit general manager John Manconi had demonstrated their faith in

our system by showing that they use it too. Pat Scrimgeour sent an email indicating that he rode transit, but did not share his experience on social media.

Twitter

Day one was Family Day and so started with comments about empty buses. There was significant criticism of the mayor and key OC Transpo executives for refusing. Also some anger at Stephen Blais for refusing, especially considering that as previous Transit Chair, he bears some blame for the current situation. In addition, some people noted that his refusal to ride transit while campaigning for a provincial seat in Orleans was not a good look.

Jeff Leiper earned extra credit for being an especially enthusiastic participant as he tweeted about taking multiple buses during the day. Several councillors shared photos of taking their children on buses to attend Family Day events.

Day two (Tuesday) was the first regular work day for most participants. It also snowed. We heard from Matthew Luloff who is not on Twitter, but shared a very comprehensive report on Facebook.

Day three (Wednesday) was the Transit Commission meeting. A number of councillors documented their commute to city hall including the mayor and Jan Harder who has a tough trip from Barrhaven. We also heard from Tim Tierney who had originally declined since he was on vacation for part of the week.

Day four (Thursday) started quietly although an innocuous tweet from councillor Fleury about losing his Presto card did spark a conversation about some annoying features of Presto. However, the afternoon commute was marred by significant problems on the train, lack of communication from officials, and delays on the replacement bus routes. We did not get confirmation that any councillors were caught in the chaos.

Day five (Friday) was unexpectedly quiet as there was a province-wide teachers' strike which reduced commuting traffic. Kudos to councillor Cloutier for tweeting in French through the week. He took several different buses to get around the city.

Day six (Saturday) was quiet as many people seemed to think that the challenge was just about commuting to and from work. We would like to reiterate that transit is essential seven days a week for getting people around the city.

Day seven (Sunday) highlighted the cost of cancellations when Sunday service is generally poor. OC Transpo cancelled so many route 6 buses that locals were left with a two-hour gap in service. It was also noted that communication on one bus was confusing, with the inner sign suggesting that the train was at Hurdman when it was, in fact, at Lyon. Jenna Sudds shared a letter she wrote to city officials detailing concerns about transit.

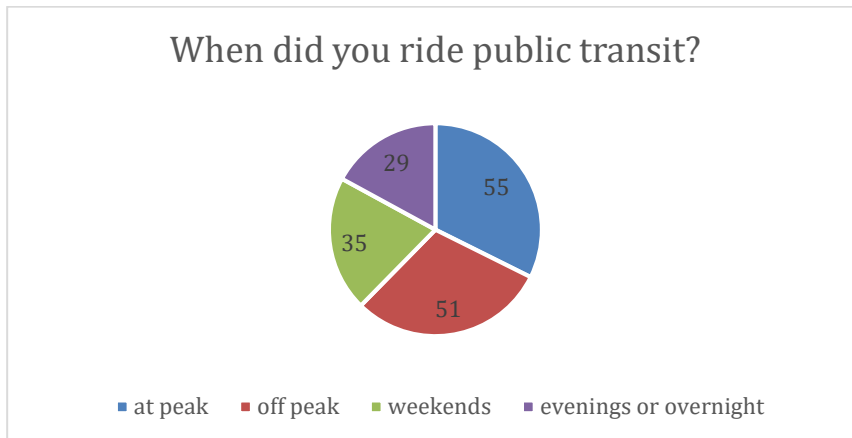
Results from end-of-challenge survey

The exact survey questions and results will be posted to the Ottawa Transit Riders website shortly. Here is some of what we learned.

For all the focus on commuters, many survey respondents used transit in *off peak* hours.

Question : Travel times / Temps de voyage:

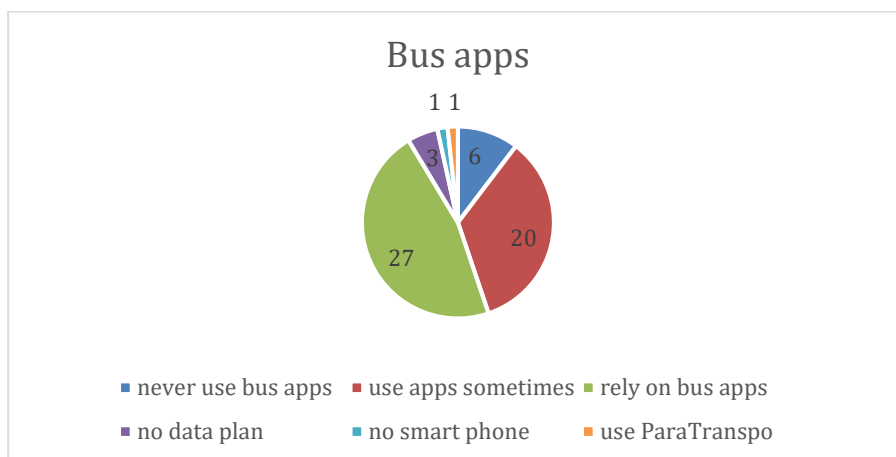
- a. At peak / Heures de pointe
- b. Off peak / En dehors des heures de pointe
- c. Both / Les deux
- d. Weekends
- e. Evenings or overnight / En soirée ou durant la nuit
- f. Other comments on travel times? / Autres commentaires sur les temps de voyage ?



We didn't ask what kind of bus apps people were using, but it's clear that they are fast becoming an important tool for transit users.

Question: Bus apps / Applications de bus :

- a. I never use bus apps or smartphone software to find out transit information / Je n'utilise jamais d'applications pour les bus ou de logiciels pour smartphones pour trouver des informations sur les transports
- b. I don't have a cell phone / Je n'ai pas de téléphone portable
- c. I don't have a data plan / Je n'ai pas de plan de données
- d. I use apps some of the time / J'utilise des applications de temps en temps
- e. I rely on apps to get around / Je compte sur les applications pour me déplacer
- b. I use ParaTranspo and have no app / J'utilise ParaTranspo et je n'ai pas d'application



Comments from survey

All the comments from the survey will be posted to the Ottawa Transit Riders website, but here is sample of what we heard:

- I avoided peak times with the train because I'm afraid of getting stuck
- ParaTranspo NEEDS to extend operating hours until 1AM weekends!!
- My commute to work was mostly OK, but I still would prefer biking when the weather changes. It would take a miraculous effort for the executives at OC Transpo to change my conviction.
- I've lived in Toronto where the monthly was much higher, but the service is more comprehensive. It's frustrating to pay this much money for a bus that may or may not show up or for a train that may break down.
- Travel times are longer than before LRT, especially the return trip to Kanata, buses leave early or arrive late at Tunney's or are cancelled.
- Monthly parking at my work is same cost as transit pass. I bus/train to work for the environment. But there are times when I am tempted to just drive.
- Fares are too high for the service offered. I would be willing to pay more if the service provided remotely matched what OC Transpo says and what we were promised.

Key Transit Issues

- *cost* - Ottawa has some of the highest fares in Canada
- *accessibility* - if the city improved its snow-clearing, residents with mobility issues would be able to use 'regular' buses rather than relying on Para Transpo which appears stretched beyond capacity
- *communications* - if OC Transpo improved its communications with users, people would be able to make alternative plans and would be less frustrated
- *climate change* - because the LRT is so fragile, OC Transpo has put a fleet of diesel buses on stand-by at rush hour - this is not helping Ottawa reduce its greenhouse gas emissions
- *electric buses* - hybrid buses are being replaced by less environmentally sound gas-only buses. There is little appetite to explore options such as electric buses
- *reliability* - buses need to be frequent and on schedule as much as possible

ParaParity

Users of ParaTranpo note that their long-standing issues and demands (such as for online booking) often get pushed back as the city and the public focuses on LRT. Demands for better accessibility should not be ignored – they are the foundation of a transit system that focuses on the needs of its riders.

OC Transpo launched their new web-based booking form for users of Para Transpo on Friday, February 21st. There has not yet been enough time to evaluate its success, but a report on ParaTranspo is forthcoming.

John Redins, a board member of Ottawa Transit Riders, documented his travels on ParaTranspo.



Moving forward

The 2020 Challenge highlighted concerns with Ottawa’s new Light Rail Train (LRT), which has proven itself to be disturbingly fragile and unreliable.

At the end of the Transit Challenge 2020, a joint press conference was held, where the four groups that organized this challenge made the following demands:

1. A continuation of the fare freeze (#Fight4FairFares) until a complete review of future fare structures is conducted;
2. A commitment by the City to a clear performance management strategy that clarifies acceptable transit service and consequences for not meeting minimum standards (including service for ParaTranspo);
3. The creation of a *Task Force on Ridership* that would include representatives from pro transit groups such as the Ottawa Transit Riders, bus drivers, and ParaTranspo users to develop solutions to transit problems.

Considerations

In light of the climate change emergency, the groups advocating for better, more affordable, more accessible transit want to see the Transit Commission review fare structures in view of

- (i) accessibility & affordability for citizens who depend on public transit,
- (ii) service levels relative to competing mobility options, and
- (iii) the climate emergency and congestion costs.

We are also perturbed by the strategy of delegating transit decisions on fares and routes from elected officials (Transit Commission) to city officials who are not responsive or accountable to the public. Greater openness and transparency would improve decision-making and bolster customer trust.

The groups involved in this challenge

The **Ottawa Transit Riders** was officially formed in 2019 as a direct result of declining transit service in Ottawa. We are a non-partisan, membership-based, advocacy group, working to make Ottawa's transit system more affordable, reliable, accessible, and safe for users. Our website is www.ottawatransitriders.ca

Ecology Ottawa is a not-for-profit, grassroots and volunteer-driven organization. We focus on solutions to climate change, pollution and waste, and we work towards developing sustainable communities where clean energy, air, and water, public transit, recycling, and green space protection take priority. Our website is <https://ecologyottawa.ca/>

The **Healthy Transportation Coalition** is a group of 35 organizations and more than 200 individuals working together to create a better, more equitable transportation system in Ottawa. Our website is <https://www.healthytransportation.ca/>

Free Transit Ottawa is made up of environmental and social justice activists who share a common goal of a more equitable and sustainable future for all. We see public transit as having a crucial role in combating climate change, and promoting social justice in Ottawa and around the world. Our website is <https://freetransitottawa.ca/>