

# Transit Challenge 2022

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](http://www.ottawatransitriders.ca)



## Vote for Transit

The municipal election will take place on **October 24th** - we call on residents of Ottawa to consider their candidate's awareness of transit issues when deciding who to vote for.

A new city council should prioritize transit, which is an essential service.

## Why the Transit Week Challenge?

In 2019, **Free Transit Ottawa** organized a Transit Week Challenge in February 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<sup>th</sup> to Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, a few months after the launch of the LRT. It was organized by the Ottawa Transit Riders, Healthy Transportation Coalition, Ecology Ottawa, and Free Transit Ottawa. It was one of the last public events that many of us participated in before the pandemic hit.

### 2021

The Transit challenge was cancelled in 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic.

### 2022

The *third* Transit Challenge took place from September 11th to 17th, coinciding with the last Transit Commission meeting of this term and the municipal campaign.

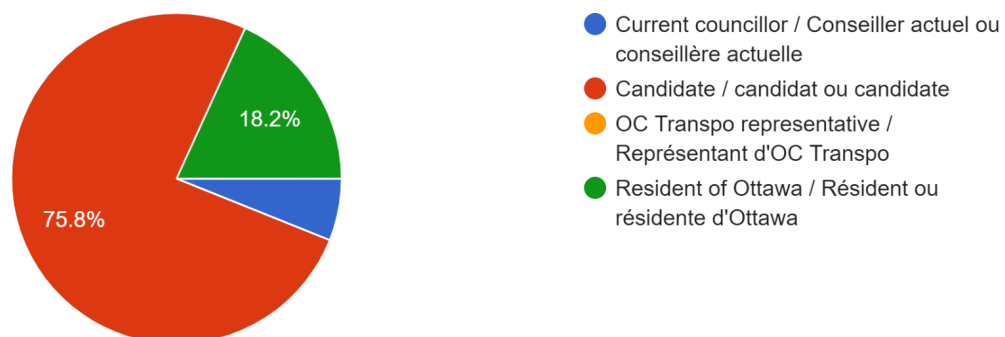
All mayoral, city council, and school trustee candidates were invited to participate, along with key OC Transpo and City of Ottawa officials, including Renée Amilcar, Pat Scrimgeour, Troy Charter, Steve Kanellakos, and Rick O'Connor.

We asked participants to consider the extra barriers ParaTranspo users face in making their own trips and we asked candidates and councillors what they were willing to do to make things equitable for disabled transit users.

66 people signed on to our challenge although some people participated without signing up. 75.8% of participants were candidates.

Who are you? / Qui êtes-vous ?

66 responses



## Frustrations

Sadly not one person from OC Transpo signed on to our challenge. This is dismaying because people who are in charge of transit should ride transit, if not every day, at least once in a while.

Renée Amilcar, the new general manager of OC Transpo recently announced an advertising campaign to encourage people to ride transit, a tone deaf move that does not bode well for her management. There are questions to be asked about how well she understands the challenges of Ottawa's system.

*Participating in the challenge would have been a positive message to riders.*

Transit Chair, Allan Hubley who has reigned over a serious decline in service, did not respond to repeated requests for him to participate.

Several candidates, including some with good transit credentials, declined to participate as they felt that they could not campaign effectively while using transit.

What does this tell us about barriers to participating in civic life?

## Kudos

Some participants went over and beyond what was expected.

Candidate **Erin Coffin**, who is running in ward 23 versus Transit Chair Allan Hubley, rode transit on several occasions. She organized a race in her riding where she and her son took the bus to Tanger Outlets while a friend raced her on foot. The video is available on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmK3-DwqzCI>



Not to give away spoilers, but her experience highlighted the challenges of unreliable service and hot, uncomfortable shelters. The bus that her bus planner indicated would show up in 3 minutes, failed to arrive so she had to wait longer than expected for a transfer.

All transit riders in Ottawa know this feeling.

Candidate **John Redins** (who is also a board member of the Ottawa Transit Riders) is probably the only candidate using ParaTranspo. Councillors should listen to people who need accessible transportation.

Candidate **Tessa Franklin**, running in Orléans East-Cumberland, wowed us with complex spreadsheets about transit. Very inspiring to see such attention to detail.

Candidate **Miranda Gray**, a candidate for #Ward 11 Beacon Hill-Cyrville, posted many thoughtful observations about shelters, schedules, way-faring, and safety from her long experience as a regular transit user.

**Miranda Gray**

@mirgray

Oct 7, 2021

My advice to OCT riders: don't vote in 2022 for any member of this term's #Ottawa council who fails to tweet, blog or write a newsletter article about a PERSONAL return trip using R1 to get to city hall during am peak travel this October. /1

Candidate **Laine Johnson**, who is running in College ward, participated on multiple days, sometimes with children, sometimes in the rain. She posted a video about her observations. She talked about long waits for the bus and concerns about safety on the bus.



Candidate **Laura Shantz** (who is a member of the Ottawa Transit Riders board) usually gets around by bike but rose to the challenge of doing the school run with two small children on the bus. She rode transit every day during the challenge. We can't show ALL her tweets, but here she is taking kids to the mall.



**Kevin Hua**, a candidate for Ward 6 - Stittsville, participated very enthusiastically in a neighbourhood with poor service. He explained the challenges of gambling to catch specific buses. Improved communication would go a long way to making transit more useable.

**Kevin Hua**

@Hua4Stittsville

Looking at the #OttTransitChallenge2022 attempts throughout this week by other candidates, it's clear that one thing that unites urban, suburban, and rural communities alike is how universally bad transit service is for all of them. Transit isn't working for anyone in this city.

He also posted a video to YouTube of a race between himself on a bus and a friend running from Stittsville to Bells Corner: <https://youtu.be/AG2RzxtIsc>

Several urban councillors and candidates noted that they mostly got around by walking, biking, or using a scooter, but many rode transit during this challenge and discussed the transit needs of the urban core - dedicated bus lanes and reliable service.

## Media

Ryan Lythal, a disability rights advocate who writes for *Ottawa Life*, wrote an article about how the Transit Challenge fails to include ParaTranspo - only one participant used Para this week.

*How the Ottawa Transit Challenge continues to fall short of addressing PWD's concerns*

[https://www.ottawalife.com/article/how-the-ottawa-transit-challenge-continues-to-fall-short-of-addressing-pwd-s-concerns?set\\_lang=en](https://www.ottawalife.com/article/how-the-ottawa-transit-challenge-continues-to-fall-short-of-addressing-pwd-s-concerns?set_lang=en)

He is right, we are aware that this challenge focuses on so-called "regular" transit buses and trains. Decision-makers need to understand the challenges that people with disabilities face in getting around Ottawa - everything from poorly cleared sidewalks to out-of-service elevators ... not to mention the lack of capacity on ParaTranspo and the frustrating limitations.

The Ottawa Transit Riders will continue to advocate for accessible transportation and will encourage decision-makers to experience ParaTranspo themselves.

*CBC: Transit challenge returns right in the middle of an election*

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/ottawa-transit-challenge-city-council-election-1.6579459>

*Ottawa transit challenge returns, ahead of municipal election | Ottawa Morning with Robyn Bresnahan*

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-100/clip/15936968>

## Final observations

The 2022 Challenge highlighted concerns with the general unreliability of the system. Many councillors and candidates feared that using transit would restrict their ability to campaign.

Thank you to everyone who participated by riding transit, talking about transit, and generally thinking about how to make transit better.

Ottawa can be better, let's hope that next year's challenge focuses on improvements.