

Kanata Transit Forum

January 21, 2023

What we heard

Introduction

Ottawa Transit Riders is a non-partisan, membership-based advocacy group, working to make Ottawa's transit system more affordable, reliable, accessible, and safe for users. Ottawa Transit Riders believes that a robust transit system is at the heart of the solutions that our City Council can implement in response to the climate crisis.

This report is about the transit forum in Kanata that was held on January 21, 2023.

Questions

At each transit forum, we divide into groups and ask participants the following questions:

1. What is the state of transit in your neighbourhood (Kanata in this case)? What is important? Which routes are essential? What are frustrations?
2. What improvements or changes do you want to see? Which routes should change? Which buses need to run more frequently or on a different schedule?
3. What should Ottawa Transit Riders advocate for?

What we heard:

Better connections needed within Kanata and to/from surrounding communities

Participants in this forum complained that routes were set up to serve commuters travelling from Kanata to downtown Ottawa, Monday to Friday, and that service *within* Kanata was poor. People gave examples of having to travel in the wrong direction to access routes going to their destinations. These detours make transit much slower and less efficient than driving.

- It's very hard to make connections throughout Kanata – buses are designed for a commuter purpose and often require heading east to go north.
- More routes are needed to get around Kanata and to get to neighbouring suburbs – often hard to get from Kanata to Stittsville.
- Transit connections are poor within Kanata to access community services and recreation centres.

- There are poor transit connections with key economic drivers within the community, such as Tanger Outlets and Canadian Tire Centre.

Recommendations:

Redesign some routes in Kanata to make obvious connections more direct. Focus on needs of residents – where do they want to go and which route is most efficient?

Better scheduling and more reliability for Kanata routes

Participants complained about poor coordination among various routes serving Kanata. They said that it is common for multiple buses going more or less in the same direction to be “clumped together” meaning that some buses run half empty while people who miss that time slot might wait a long time for another bus. It would be smarter to stagger these routes so that if a rider misses one bus, they could catch an alternative bus.

Some routes are cancelled back-to-back, leaving huge gaps in service and some buses that are the only ones serving a particular area are cancelled too often, leaving riders stranded.

- OC Transpo frequently cancels route 61 Stittsville, resulting in long (sometimes 1hr) gaps between trips for that full route (we have been told that the 61 is a frequent route and that's why it is often cancelled, but there seems to be no consideration whether it's the 61 Terry Fox or the 61 Stittsville and the frequency of that destination when the decision to cancel is made).
- Trips for multiple routes going to the same place servicing the same area at the same time (e.g., 267, 61 and 67 have trips serving Glen Cairn around the same time during the morning commute but from different stops, so if you miss one or one is cancelled/late, you can't make it to a different stop to catch a different route).
- Issues with 252, 256, 164, and 168 routes.
- Routes 257, 168, and 110 often all arrive at the same time at Eagleson, so that when you miss one, you miss them all. Need better staggering of routes.

Recommendations

Set rules for cancellations – don't cancel two route 61s going to the same destination back-to-back. Avoid cancellations of routes that are the only bus serving a specific area, especially rural or isolated areas. Review the scheduling of buses that are complementary, that is travelling to the same general area, so that they don't arrive and depart at the same time.

Better connections to other parts of the city

Participants complained that it was often difficult to get from Kanata to other important destinations in Ottawa – especially hospitals and universities.

- The need for better connections to key civic services was noted. In particular, how hard it is to get to hospitals like CHEO, which is in the eastern part of the city. Need better transit linkages to these areas.

- The ending of the express buses was noted as a key change that has resulted in Kanata residents being more frustrated with the levels of service. Riders face longer commutes with transfers to the LRT.
- Need better connections to universities and colleges from Kanata – students are spending 1.5 hours at times on the bus to get to class.
- Need OC Transpo to liaise with high schools in the area to get a better sense of needs and capacity for local routes, especially during special events. Students noted that bus service to schools often makes after-school activities difficult.

Recommendations

Review Kanata routes with residents and consider re-instating some express buses for high-need destinations, for example hospitals and universities.

Communications and Technology

Participants expressed frustration with the lack of communication from OC Transpo regarding route changes, delays, and cancellations. They noted that when buses are cancelled with very little notice, it is often difficult to make alternative arrangements. Students in our session noted that the best way to receive immediate information requires a smart phone and data, but not everyone has access to such technology.

Transit is an equity issues and access to good up-to-date information on buses should not require expensive technology.

Please note that the transit forum took place shortly before OC Transpo announced that they would cancel most residential routes in Kanata during a major weather event so we could not discuss that proposal. OC Transpo backed down from this idea after public outcry, but it is an example of the transit system failing to consult with locals on key issues or consider the ramifications of leaving large swaths of Kanata completely without service.

- The OC Transpo app is constantly unreliable – we need to develop better technology that can actually track buses.
- Also, not everyone has access to a mobile phone. We should have live up-to-date schedules listed electronically with real-time tracking on stops like they do in other cities (perhaps on major routes first).
- GPS must be improved to work consistently (citywide).
- Communication must be improved regarding cancelled and late trips (citywide).
- OC Transpo must communicate planned canceled trips in advance (e.g., when R1 is running).

Recommendations

Improve communication with riders, especially about cancellations. Create a policy detailing best practices for informing riders, preferably with as much notice given as possible. Use different methods, including low-tech options for informing riders of schedules and cancellations.

Transit Infrastructure

Participants noted that infrastructure for walking (sidewalks) and biking is often poor in Kanata, making it difficult to walk or bike to bus stops and stations. Accessibility is a major concern – there is no point in having low floor, accessible buses if people with mobility challenges cannot get to and from bus stops.

Participants complained that Kanata is so focused on drivers that the needs of non-drivers are forgotten. Several people noted that unsafe sidewalks and crosswalks spaced far apart make walking and taking transit risky in some areas.

- There is a lack of crosswalks at essential transit stops, i.e. Teron, Castlefrank/Hazeldean means that these stops are hard to access, especially in the winter.
- Better snow clearing is needed at bus stops.
- There are safety issues related to cars splashing riders at stops close to major thoroughfares.
- Route 110 needs more stops on Fallowfield.

Recommendations

Improve pedestrian infrastructure, build bike lanes, and provide bike storage at major transit stations. Improve snow clearing. Make sure that all bus stops are fully accessible and connected to sidewalks. Review crosswalks and signals to make sure that pedestrians can get around safely.

What should Ottawa Transit Riders advocate for?

The Ottawa Transit Riders will focus on the following issues based on what we learned at the Kanata Transit Forum:

Overall – The city needs to consult with locals on their needs and re-adjust routes to provide better service within Kanata.

Accessibility – Improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and make sure that sidewalks and bus stops are properly cleared of snow.

Communication – Improve communication *to* riders about delays and cancellations while also allowing for feedback *from* riders.

Routes – Reinstate some express buses, especially to key destinations such as hospitals and universities.

The Ottawa Transit Riders is grateful to the people who took time on a cold Saturday afternoon to provide their feedback on transit and express their hopes for better service.