

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Transit Commission
Commission du transport en commun
31 March 2021 / 31 mars 2021**

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**Submitted by
Soumis par:**
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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2021-TSD-TS-0006

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Service Adjustments – Update

OBJET: Modifications de service en raison de la COVID-19 – mise à jour

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Transit Commission receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que la Commission du transport en commun prenne acte du présent rapport aux fins d'information.

BACKGROUND

Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic spread to Canada, starting on March 25, 2020, OC Transpo service levels were reduced by approximately 50 percent. This was done

to preserve operational capacity in case the virus had been transmitted much more quickly through the population than proved to be the case. Measures were taken to ensure OC Transpo had sufficient operational capacity to cover off operations and accommodate staff that had to self-isolate or quarantine due to having contracted COVID-19. These measures were possible because, with the initial lockdown, ridership on the OC Transpo declined by approximately 85 percent, as people stayed home from work, school, and other activities.

On June 1, 2020, the Transit Commission approved the OC Transpo Transit Service Recovery Plan – COVID-19 ([ACS2020-TSD-TS-0003](#)), returning the system to normal seasonal service. As part of the return to full service, OC Transpo implemented a series of measures to keep our customers and staff safe. These include mandatory masks in all vehicles and at all stations and shelters; continuing enhanced cleaning of buses, trains, and stations; the installation of barrier shields at operator cabs on buses; the installation of hand sanitizer dispensers at stations; controlling the flow of buses into busy transfer stations; and continued provision of touch-free fare payment. Since January 2021, the touch free payment system now also includes customer testing of credit card payments on a fare gate at Rideau Station.

As the lockdowns ended and the economy began to reopen in mid-2020, transit ridership began a slow and steady climb from July through September, to level off at approximately 30 percent of normal levels in the fall of 2020. As 2021 began, the province implemented a stay-at-home order, and ridership dropped to about 18 percent of normal levels in January, then rose to approximately 21 percent in early February when schools reopened, and has increased further in late February.

Through 2020 and continuing into 2021, City staff have been reducing operating expenses and capital spending while still maintaining service across the entire transit network. Service increases that had been planned for 2020 and 2021 have been deferred until a future time when transit ridership is higher. Selected major capital projects have been deferred into future years to preserve financial flexibility for the City. The federal and provincial governments have provided funding through the Safe Restart Agreement to make the City financially whole from April 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, after the reduced fare revenue and the additional COVID-19 costs.

DISCUSSION

A set of COVID-19 service adjustments are being made in mid-2021, which will better match the connectivity and capacity of the OC Transpo system to the current travel

needs in Ottawa. These service adjustments are based on current ridership counts and on suggestions from customers, employers, Councillors, and staff. The service adjustments will result in approximately \$5.5 million of cost savings in 2021 and the potential for approximately \$11 million of savings in the full year 2022. Workforce reductions will be achieved by attrition and reassignment.

There are five components to the COVID-19 service adjustments, described in more detail below:

- The temporary suspension of selected peak-period routes with very low ridership and where there are other nearby services;
- Frequency reductions on certain routes to better match actual current ridership levels;
- Routes being shortened where parallel service is available;
- Service improvements on a number of routes to respond to current travel needs; and,
- A reduction in operating costs.

All parts of the urban area will continue to receive transit service that meets the applicable service standards.

Temporary COVID-19 suspension of certain peak-period routes

Connexion routes provide a direct service from certain residential areas to major transfer stations on O-Train Line 1 and are primarily used by customers travelling to work or to post-secondary institutions downtown. The customers who use these routes are the ones who are most affected by the decisions of employers to have their staff work from home and the decisions of universities and colleges to change to distance learning. On average, ridership on all 39 Connexion routes is currently at 14 percent of its normal levels, with an average of five customers using each trip.

Eight of these Connexion routes are parallel or nearby to other routes which also provide a direct connection to major transfer stations on O-Train Line 1.

Also included in this group is one peak-period route which operates directly into downtown.

The following nine routes will be temporarily suspended starting in June 2021. Their last day of operation will be Friday, June 18, 2021.

- Route 17 from Wateridge – Customers can use Routes 7 and 27
- Route 224 from Beacon Hill – Customers can use Route 24 to connect to Blair Station
- Route 225 from Orléans and Chapel Hill South – Customers can use Route 34 and adjusted Route 32 to connect to Blair Station
- Route 233 from Orléans – Customers can use Route 33 to connect to Blair Station
- Route 235 from Orléans – Customers can use Route 35 to connect to Blair Station
- Route 251 from Bells Corners – Customers can use Route 57 to connect to Tunney's Pasture Station
- Route 266 from Kanata – Customers can use Routes 63 and 64 to connect to Tunney's Pasture Station
- Route 275 from Barrhaven – Customers can use Route 75 to connect to Tunney's Pasture Station
- Route 284 from Manordale – Customers can use adjusted Route 82 to connect to Tunney's Pasture Station

These routes will be temporarily suspended until system ridership recovers to closer to normal levels.

With the suspension of these routes, some customers will have a longer wait time at their nearest bus stop, a smaller number of customers will have a longer travel time to their destination, and some customers at particular bus stops will have a longer walk to their nearest bus stop.

Frequency reductions

As noted above, ridership on Connexion routes is currently at an average of 14 percent of normal ridership levels. Ridership on the Rapid and Frequent routes that make up the primary transit network is currently at an average of 35 percent of normal levels, but in a

range between 20 and 50 percent, indicating that some of these routes are more important than others to those customers who are currently travelling by transit.

The following COVID-19 service adjustments will be made, beginning on Sunday, June 20:

Service on Connexion Routes 231, 232, 234, 236, 237, 252, 256, 257, 258, 261, 262, 263, 264, 267, 268, 270, 271, 272, 273, 277, 278, 282, 290, 291, and 294 will be reduced to every 30 minutes. The times of the first and last trips in the morning and afternoon will be set to be close to the current times, but there may need to be some changes, and there may be intervals between trips that are more than 30 minutes early or late in the peak period, in order to best match the current first and last trip times.

During peak periods from Monday to Friday, service will be reduced on Rapid Routes 57, 75 and 98, on Frequent Routes 6, 7, 10, 25, 80, 88, and 111, and on Local Routes 9 (peak direction), 30, 46, 66, and 93. In all of these cases, service will continue to be provided every 15 minutes or more frequently. Also during peak periods, service will be reduced to every 30 minutes on the extensions to Gatineau of Rapid Routes 61, 63, and 75.

During peak periods from Monday to Friday, service will be reduced to every 30 minutes on Local Routes 5, 9 (off-peak direction), 18, 19, 26, 28, 33, 34, 38 (morning only), 48, 49, 50, 54, 73 (with additional trips in the busiest hour), 81, 82, 86 (off-peak direction), 89 (off-peak direction), 92, 96, and 171. In addition, during peak periods, service will be reduced from every 30 minutes to every hour on Local Routes 164 and 175.

At all times from Monday to Friday, service will be reduced to every 30 minutes on the section of Local Route 51 west of Lincoln Fields Station to Britannia. There will be no change to the service level between Tunney's Pasture Station and Lincoln Fields Station.

Seven days a week, service will be reduced to every 30 minutes on the section of Rapid Route 97 south of South Keys Station to the airport, where ridership is at approximately 19 percent of normal levels. There will be no change to the service level between Hurdman Station and South Keys Station.

In the midday from Monday to Friday, service will be reduced to every 30 minutes on Local Route 9.

In the evening, service will be reduced to every 30 minutes after 10:00 p.m. seven days a week on Rapid Route 39, and service will be reduced to every hour Monday to Friday after 6:30 p.m. on Local Route 54.

On Saturdays and Sundays, service will be reduced to every 15 minutes on O-Train Line 2 replacement buses. On Sunday afternoons, service will be reduced to every 15 minutes on Frequent Routes 6 and 7.

Individual trips early or late in the day on all routes will be reviewed through the planning and scheduling process for possible removal where ridership is currently at or near zero.

The level of service on all of these routes will still be enough to accommodate all current customers and to leave room for ridership to grow. With the frequency reduction on these routes, some customers will have a longer wait time at their bus stop. There will not normally be any change to customers' walking distance or travel time, and options remain available for some customers to also consider using other routes which may best meet their preferred travel time. Staff will monitor ridership levels on all of these routes, and the frequency of service will be increased as transit ridership recovers closer to normal levels, in order to provide sufficient capacity to continue to accommodate all customers.

Routes being shortened where parallel service is available

Eight routes are being revised where they parallel other services providing the same connectivity. Enough capacity is available on the remaining routes to accommodate all customers at the current ridership level.

- Route 15 – Midday service from Monday to Friday to the Museum of History in Gatineau will be removed. Customers who use this service can instead use STO Route 67.
- Route 37 – All trips will start and end at Place d'Orléans Station. Customers can transfer to Route 39 and other routes to continue to or from Blair Station.
- Route 40 – All trips which currently extend via the Transitway will start and end at Greenboro Station. Customers can transfer to Routes 97, 98, and other routes to continue to or from Hurdman Station.
- Route 55 – All trips will start and end at Westgate Shopping Centre. Customers can transfer to Route 85 to continue to or from Bayshore Station.

- Route 58 – All trips will start and end at Lincoln Fields Station. Customers can transfer to Routes 57, 61, 62, 63, 64, 74, 75, and other routes to continue to or from Tunney’s Pasture Station.
- Route 74 – All trips which currently extend via the Vimy Memorial Bridge will start and end at Nepean Woods Station. Customers can transfer to Route 99 to continue to or from Riverview Station.
- Route 83 – All trips will start or end at Baseline Station. Customers can transfer to Routes 74, 75, and other routes to continue to or from Tunney’s Pasture Station.
- Route 84 – All trips will start or end at Baseline Station. Customers can transfer to Routes 74, 75, and other routes to continue to or from Tunney’s Pasture Station.

Service improvements

While ridership has declined across the system during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not done so uniformly. As noted above, ridership on routes used primarily by customers travelling from suburban areas to points downtown have declined the most. In contrast, ridership on routes serving hospitals, shopping areas, and some employment locations has remained higher, and in some cases up to 80 percent of normal levels.

As a result, service will be improved on 15 routes, to better support current travel needs, with an emphasis on hospitals, shopping districts, and growing employment areas. The specific improvements will be:

- Route 11 – Route extended to Mackenzie King Bridge to provide improved connections to the Rideau Centre and uOttawa.
- Route 19 – Route extended during shopping hours to Hurdman Station via St-Laurent, Belfast, and Terminal, to provide a new connection to the Trainyards shopping area.
- Route 32 – Route extended to Chapel Hill Station, to continue peak period service to Willow Aster Circle and new midday service to bus stops along Fern Casey Street and Renaud Road.

- Route 33 – Increased service from Monday to Friday, to provide service every 30 minutes through the middle of the day. These midday trips will start and end at Place d'Orléans Station.
- Route 53 – Revised route to operate on Holland Avenue instead of Parkdale Avenue, to reduce travel times and improve reliability.
- Route 55 – Sunday service extended to Westgate Shopping Centre, serving The Ottawa Hospital's General, Riverside, and Civic campuses, the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre, and Catherine and Chamberlain/Isabella south of downtown, and connecting with O-Train Line 1 at Lees Station.
- Route 56 – Increased service seven days a week on Parkdale Avenue between Tunney's Pasture Station and The Ottawa Hospital's Civic Campus, to replace the current service provided by Route 53.
- Route 62 – More frequent and later evening service and new Saturday and Sunday service to Kanata and Stittsville. This improved service will replace some current trips to and from Tanger Outlets on Route 162.
- Route 82 – Revised route to operate via Majestic in peak periods, as it does at other times of the week.
- Route 88 – Increased service on Saturdays, so that buses run every 15 minutes through more of the day.
- Route 98 – Increased service on Sundays, so that buses run every 30 minutes in the morning and evening and every 15 minutes in the afternoon.
- Route 99 – Selected trips extended to Citigate in Barrhaven to match shift times at the new Amazon building, which is expected to be operational this fall. (This change will begin on Sunday, September 5.)
- New Route 110 – New service between Kanata North, Kanata South, and Barrhaven, serving the Kanata North business area, Hazeldean Mall, and Citigate, and connecting with Rapid routes at Innovation, Teron, Eagleson, and Fallowfield Stations. The new route will operate every 30 minutes from Monday to Friday and at selected times on weekends to match shift times at the new Amazon building. (Saturday and Sunday service will begin on Sunday, September 5.) The route will replace current Route 179 which provides limited service between Citigate and Fallowfield Station.

- Route 170 – Adjusted route at Citigate to operate on newly-constructed streets, to remove temporary service from private internal roadways, and to bring service closer to employment locations.
- Route 294 – Realigned route in the Leitrim (Findlay Creek) area to operate on Kelly Farm Drive between Dun Skipper Drive and Leitrim Road. Service on Findlay Creek Drive will continue to be provided by Route 93.

Operating cost savings

The net result of this package of service adjustments is a reduction in OC Transpo operations by approximately 2170 service hours each week, resulting in a cost saving of approximately \$5.5 million in 2021 and approximately \$11 million in the full year 2022, if the effects of the pandemic continue that long. The lower operating workforce will be achieved by attrition and reassignment. By year end, there will be approximately 70 fewer staff members funded from the transit operating budget than there are currently.

Implementation

As noted above, these service adjustments are being made effective Sunday, June 20, 2021. Staff are currently preparing the new schedules for customers and staff and will be continuing with workforce administration.

Full details of these service changes will be communicated to customers through signage and electronic materials, accompanied by in-person customer outreach at key stations and times of day.

OC Transpo has several customer-friendly applications and tools so that customers can get timely information about our service while on the go. These include texting 560560 for real-time bus schedule information, downloading the OC Transpo iPhone app or an independent app, signing up for text alerts on octranspo.com to receive the latest information, checking transit information screens at many major stations, as well as visiting octranspo.com from a smartphone. Real time information is also available by calling 613-560-1000 plus the bus stop number.

Once these COVID-19 service adjustments begin, customers can find up-to-date schedules and real-time information by using these applications and tools.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

These service adjustments do not affect transit service in the rural parts of the City.

CONSULTATION

No specific public consultation was conducted during the development of this plan, but all service adjustments have been developed based on ridership measurements and feedback from customers.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

This is a city-wide report.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) COMMENTS

N/A

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving this report for information.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Risks are identified in this report and are being managed by staff.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with receiving the information contained within the report. The costs savings will be offset against COVID costs incurred.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

The entire OC Transpo network remains accessible to all customers and Para Transpo services are not affected by the service adjustments outlined in this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

This report directly or indirectly supports the following 2019-2022 Term of Council Priorities:

- Integrated Transportation: Enable effective mobility through a sustainable, accessible and connected city transportation system.
- Service Excellence Through Innovation: Deliver quality services that are innovative and continuously improve to meet the needs of individuals and communities.

- Environmental Stewardship: Grow and protect a healthy, beautiful, and vibrant city that can adapt to change.

DISPOSITION

Staff will implement the COVID-19 Service Adjustments as outlined in this report and will undertake any direction from the Transit Commission.