

Dear Councillor

Jan 7, 2010

I am writing to you today on behalf of the City Centre Coalition (CCC) as a follow-up to our presentation on the DOTT project to Transit Committee on Dec 16 . At that meeting we detailed some of our concerns with the current DOTT project.

Overall we are pleased that in this iteration of the Transit plan that the City has placed priority on solving the downtown congestion problem via implementation of an electric LRT based trunk system and evolving to the use of buses as branch feeders. However, as the transit plan has evolved and the details of the tunnel design/ depth / routing have emerged it has caused us to have some second thoughts which we would like to share with you in this letter. We hope this will encourage similar reflection on your parts as you contemplate the largest capital project in Ottawa's history.

We are concerned that some elements of the current DOTT plan are an over-reaction to the previous LRT plan (which was cancelled in part due to concerns related to downtown core capacity/ congestion). As a result, in this current plan it appears the primary focus has been on a maximum capacity solution for the downtown at the expense of other important goals such as quick implementation time frame, improvement in travel times, and capturing of new ridership. These 3 items we believe are weaknesses in the current plan and are the side effects of choosing to implement a complex and expensive tunnel based solution upfront. We are concerned that surface based E-LRT options across the downtown have been dropped without thorough analysis and that all possible alternatives for what could be an adequate surface based solution in the near-mid term have not been fully explored.

Let us elaborate first on the 3 consequences which Ottawa is accepting as a side effect of the decision to go with an expensive tunnel solution in the downtown core.

1. Delayed implementation time frame

The current tunnel proposal is costly and will take a long time to complete, resulting in the first paying customers not riding the system until ten years from now! City Staff predict 65-100M\$ in operational cost savings when the system is in operation and these are desperately needed as the costs of operating the bus backbone (and the current downtown transit congestion issues) in Ottawa are escalating rapidly. A business case analysis could show that getting the system running sooner and capturing more new riders in the short term may be a superior scenario to first prioritizing a 50-100 year solution for the downtown. Such a business case may demonstrate that the increased operational cost savings from an earlier in-service solution could easily self-finance the implementation of a tunnel a few decades in the future should such increased capacity be required then.

2. Insufficient improvement in end-end travel times.

A surface based project implementation which is in operation much sooner and at less cost in the downtown core could then allow these cost savings to be allocated to extending the cost-benefits and ridership attractiveness of rail further out towards the edge of the Ottawa greenbelt sooner (Westwards and North-South). One of the flaws of the current plan is that even when first operational 10 years from now, the overall system will be limited to the Tunney's-Blair corridor until as late as 2030. In other words 20 years from now, most citizens of Ottawa will still not be able to experience the benefits of rail without first making an additional transfer. We are not against transfers...but in this system, almost 100% of the users of the system towards downtown must transfer and there is no hope of this changing for more than 20 years. By focusing on a high capacity tunnel in the beginning we are paying a high price in terms of improving end-end travel times.

3. Lack of attention to capturing new ridership.

Similar to the previous item, because the benefits of rail in the current plan are limited to such a short line length (12km) with no further extension for as much as 20 years, the proposed solution will accomplish relatively little in attracting new additional riders to the system over this time period. With all the expense and complication of a tunnel based solution up front we have put as a second priority the attraction of riders to the system in the first 20 years of its operation.

Summary:

All three of the above weaknesses stem in part from the high up front cost and complexity of implementing a tunnel based solution. These are the trade-offs which we are accepting in order to have a tunnel. The CCC is concerned the costs / benefits of these trade-offs have not been adequately analyzed and that the feasibility of a surface based solution has been dismissed without sufficient study of all possible implementations (LRT only with no buses operating on either Slater or Albert as one possible example).

The CCC is asking council to re-consider whether the implementation of a tunnel across the downtown first should be the cornerstone of Ottawa's transit plan. We believe surface-based E-LRT solutions may have been too easily dismissed as a reaction to the downtown surface shortcomings of the previously cancelled LRT plan.

Lastly we have one other concern with the current DOTT proposal which is secondary to the three mentioned above but still important to be noted:

#### 4. Depth / Routing of the proposed Tunnel Alignment

It is our understanding that the desire to locate a station at Rideau has led to a cross-country alignment that requires the tunnel and station depth to be in excess of 10 stories below the surface. We believe that the implications of having such deep stations in what is only a moderate sized city have not been given enough consideration. For many lifetimes to come, no transit rider on the LRT system in Ottawa will be able to enter/exit the downtown without using mechanical escalators/elevators to ascend/descend 10 stories. At an intuitive level this just seems wrong for a city the size of Ottawa. In NYC and Paris for example many subway lines require a simple descent of a single set of stairs to access the platforms. This will never be possible in Ottawa with the current plan. We ask councillors to reflect on how wise / appropriate a choice this is for the overall usability and desirability of our system.

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Chair: City Centre Coalition

#### MEMBERS OF CITY CENTRE COALITION:

Action Sandy Hill

Centretown Citizens' Community Association

Dalhousie Community Association

Hintonburg Community Association

Westboro Community Association

Old Ottawa East Community Association

Glebe Community Association

Dow's Lake Residents' Association

Old Ottawa South Community Association

Carleton University Students' Association

Citizens for Safe Cycling

