

**FREE** ———  
**TRANSIT** — —  
**OTTAWA** ———

## Transit Week Challenge Toolkit

By Free Transit Ottawa

We are a group of transit-concerned, socially minded Ottawans who advocate for free transit in Ottawa.

## The Steps

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## 1. Pick a Direction

It's important to make sure that from the start your campaign works with your politics. Are you focusing on the quality of the service or too-high fares? Challenging councillors to take specific action or mobilizing the public? What are your demands? Will you invite only councillors, or other political and community leaders to take the challenge? If you'll invite others, who and why?

As an example, FTO focused on mobilizing the public and improving transit service. We encouraged people to use hashtags to share their complaints which demonstrated public support for transit improvements. We sent councillors a survey to complete each [day](#) and one [at the end of the challenge](#), which allowed us to collect stories and examples of the issues with transit. Our survey asked questions about which demographics were best served by our transit system, and what issues they faced in their day. We also offered a sign-up for non-councillors, so that citizens could take part.

Make sure you know your goals so you can design a coherent campaign.

## 2. Start Organizing

To encourage councillors to be involved and to capture a wide net for your media coverage, we recommend partnering with other organizations as “endorsers.” What this means is that they support the challenge, and may choose to promote it. This can build the pressure for councillors to take part and take the challenge seriously. Consider all of the groups that are affected by transit issues, and be creative: gender, migration, poverty, urban planning, and climate change are all issues that connect to transit.

*TIP: Some organizations need to make decisions collectively, and meetings can be few and far between. Be proactive in reaching out to groups as soon as possible.*

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### **An example email invitation follows:**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I'm reaching out to see if you'd like to be a partner for an upcoming event. For one week in (*MONTH - DATE*), we're challenging our city councillors to use our transit system to get around. We'll promote the experience, and at the end we'll \_\_\_\_\_ (*List any post-challenge events, and your goals for the campaign*).

(Say something about the organization and their connection to transit). The more names on our partner list, the greater the pressure on our councillors to take part! Endorsing the challenge means your organization will be on our publications as a supporter, and if you're able, it also means helping us with promoting it via email/social media.

Our transit system is important to our city. (*Explain why you're doing this: Ex. It helps people get around, stay connected, access important services, and a huge portion of most city's carbon emissions come from transportation. This could be reduced through more transit use over private cars.*)

But we think there's a lot of work to do. We want to make sure that our councillors are really connected to the issue, and we think this is a great way to do that.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Your Name

C: ### # ##

W: [www.website.com](http://www.website.com)

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/yourorg>

An initiative of (*Free Transit Ottawa*).

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Co-sponsored by \_\_\_\_\_ and more to come

### 3. Contact Councillors

It is important to be strategic with how you approach councillors. Send an email, but also be sure to call first. With a phone call you're more likely to get a response than with an email alone. Have your details solid before the call! Be clear on the dates, the goal, the demands and the expected outcomes.

Having support from other organizations shows that the community wants councillors to take part. Include the organizations' names and logos on your communications with councillors and the public.

Approach supportive councillors first. Do you have contacts with anyone in city hall? Find out if any councillors have been involved in transit improvements or campaigning. Once you have one or two on board, it's easier to get others interested.

If you're having difficulty, take to the media to add pressure. Be tactful, as we had some criticism that councillors said they were feeling "bullied." Use positive ideas of community outreach, engagement and interaction, and remind them that the challenge can be a learning tool.

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**A sample email follows:**

Hello Councillor \_\_\_\_\_!

I'm reaching out today to follow up from my call about the Transit Week Challenge with some more details. Our challenge is simple - **we want you to take the bus.**

For just one week in [*MONTH - DATES*], we're challenging our city councillors to use our transit system to get around. You'll get to interact with people in your ward, become familiar with our transit system up-close and personal, and be involved in an exciting campaign. We'll ask you to [*answer some questions about your experience, and at the end we'll be holding a press conference to share your results*].

Signed up so far we have: \_\_\_\_\_

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[Your Name]

C: ### ##

W: [www.website.com](http://www.website.com)



FB: <https://www.facebook.com/yourorg>

Email: [email@gmail.com](mailto:email@gmail.com)

An initiative of: [*Free Transit Ottawa*]

Co-Sponsored by: \_\_\_\_\_ and more to come

## 4. Be Media Ready

### Promotion

Have a poster and other graphics prepared for sharing on your website and social media. You can create an event on Facebook. Encourage your partners to share the challenge online and through their email lists. Reach out to local news, radio, and other media before, during and after the challenge. We prepared a media release and backgrounder to announce the challenge, and a sample of each are below. To encourage broad participation, we also offered a way for non-councillors to take the challenge by visiting a page on [our website](#) and filling out a simple form.

*Tip: Sign up forms can be created for free with MailChimp, which then creates easy mailing lists to send information, updates and reminders throughout the challenge. We used one list for councillors and a different one for the general public.*

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### **Draft press release:**

Ottawa's city councillors have been invited to take the Transit Week Challenge. For 7 days from February 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, they will attempt to use the city's transit system (buses,

LRT) for all transportation. # of councillors have agreed to take the challenge (NAMES) while others have refused (NAMES). Notably, members of the transit commission have not taken the challenge (NAMES).

The intent of the challenge is to ensure that councillors experience the issues that exist. Councillors have power over transit decisions including budget decisions and fare increases but do not use transit themselves. Ottawa's draft city budget will be tabled in February 6. The transit tax is expected to increase this year by 3.5%, even higher than predicted 2.5% increases. Despite increasing costs, service is lacking.

Councillors will be facing icy sidewalks, cold waits, traffic jams and late service. They will answer daily questions and a longer survey at the end of the week. Their feedback will be combined with other data gathered from regular users to create a report highlighting the transit system's weaknesses. Councillors will be invited to a press conference to discuss their experiences and to celebrate the launch of the Ottawa Transit Rider's Group.

*"QUOTE" (Tip: Media groups like using quotes in articles, so providing them makes them more likely to write a piece. Especially quotes from participants and councillors)*

The challenge is an initiative of Free Transit Ottawa, a local group organizing for free and accessible transit as an equitable answer to climate change. It is supported by the Healthy Transportation Coalition, the ATU Local 279, Carleton Student Energy, Ecology Ottawa, and MORE. Anyone is welcome to take the challenge themselves by signing up at [www.freetransitottawa.com](http://www.freetransitottawa.com).

### **Social Media**

Prepare graphics, choose easy to remember hashtags, and be ready to monitor and encourage online discussion. We found that Twitter was especially active. Tag councillors when they join the challenge, and call out those who haven't signed on.

*Tip: To keep the campaigns connected, we recommend all groups use #transitchallenge along with a local, city-specific hashtag.*

[Here](#) is a link to a twitter round-up of the event, to show the types of discussion that can evolve. It highlights the importance of pushing hashtags, because it allows people to follow what happens.

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*A sample poster is below:*



### During the Campaign

Make the most of the attention the campaign gets. If you have a website, direct traffic there. Encourage people to join and volunteer to keep the momentum going. Gather information about the most pressing issues in transit, that people are most vocal and concerned about, to guide your campaigns.

It is also important to try to direct the conversation towards the political issues you want to engage. Link transit issues with funding problems at various government levels, and a

prioritization of private vehicles over public services, as an example. Have these points clear so that you can use the attention effectively.

We created a list of talking points to ensure everyone was ready to answer questions.

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**Sample list of talking points for councillors/partners/media:**

- The purpose is to get a better understanding of our transit system
- It's a great opportunity to meet/interact with people in your ward
- It will be a good chance to show you're working on/care about transit
- You can acknowledge what works, the purpose is not to be entirely negative. Looking for solutions and expanding them is also a positive step for transit
- The more involved the better, but if they can only commit part-way, welcome them (we can apply more pressure later)
- If they live far away, remind them that that is the reality for a number of people in our city
- Asks
  - Fare freeze
  - Transit commission to look into service issues
  - Free transit pilot project
- Goals of the campaign:
  - Maintain transit as an issue at municipal level
  - Encourage interaction/involvement between councillors and general population
  - Identify strengths and places for improvement

- Why?
  - Environmental impact of better transit
  - Improve transit which has a disproportionate role in the lives of the poor/marginalized

We also produced a backgrounder with more details. This can be useful to shared within your organization, with media and partners, and used to guide interviews.

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**Sample backgrounder:**

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. Public transit has a crucial role in combating climate change and promoting social justice in Ottawa and around the world.

After holding three community forums and interacting with transit users, we have found common complaints. Buses are too expensive, transit service is unreliable (buses are often late or cancelled), the system is inaccessible (including the poorly functioning ParaTranspo service) and communities don't feel included or consulted when OC Transpo makes route/service changes.

Free Transit Ottawa has put together a Transit Week 2019 Transit Challenge asking city councillors and the general public to take transit for the week of February 4 to 10. The goal was to get people talking about

transit and get the decision-makers out on the buses, experiencing the good and bad alongside the regular transit users.

15 councillors took the challenge: Allan Hubley, Mathieu Fleury, Stephen Blais, Matt Luloff, Laura Dudas, Glen Gower, Theresa Kavanagh, Keith Egli, Catherine McKenney, Jeff Leiper, Shawn Menard, Carole Anne Meehan, Jean Cloutier, Jenna Sudds, Tim Tierney, Diane Deans, and Riley Brockington. They and their fellow riders experienced crowding, crowded buses passing by and not stopping, late-late-late buses and buses that never came, missed meetings, frozen feet, challenges getting around the community during off-peak hours, filled up park n' ride lots

SUMMARIZE EXPERIENCES. [Some councillors who signed up did not actively participate.]

Some declined the invitation (Jim Watson, Jan Harder, Scott Moffatt, and George Darouze) while others did not respond to invitations. The councillors who declined to participate blamed insufficient service provided by OC Transpo; Jan Harder notes that despite efforts to use the system she "Cannot commit to a full week."

### **Ways Forward - Course Correction Needed**

Clearly Ottawa's bus transit system is on an unsustainable path with a multitude of service issues, declining ridership, rising fares, connectivity issues to LRT, competition from ride-sharing services Uber and Lift, and rising greenhouse gas emissions. We suggest,

- Freeze of all fares
- A free transit pilot project
- A Task Force on Ridership including participation from the Ottawa Transit Riders (citizen and driver input) and Paratranspo

### **Relevant Facts**



**Ridership:** fell from 103.5 million trips a year in 2011 to 96.5 million trips in 2016, while the population of Ottawa rose from 936,900 to 991,700

**Fares:** have been increasing an average of 2.5% per year since 2011, while inflation has been much lower at only about 1.6%. Transit fares have increased faster than wages and other costs in people's lives. Transit fares are scheduled to rise again on July 1 2019, including for Equipass users. Draft Budget 2019 has proposed that in addition to Wednesdays, seniors 65 and over also travel for free on Sundays, beginning on July 1 2019.

**Gender lens:** Women take transit more than men. Women also face higher threats of harassment and assault than men.

**Climate Lens:** Greenhouse gas emissions from OTranspo are rising. Between 2012 and 2016, transit fleet emissions increased by approximately 6% (roughly 8 kt CO<sub>2</sub>E). During this time OC transpo increased the number of km travelled by 2.75% and the amount of diesel fuel used by 5%.

Whereas other cities like Edmonton, Montreal and Toronto are investing in electric buses, OTranspo has just ordered 82 diesel buses from Nova Bus and the draft city budget 2019 makes no reference to greening the bus fleet.

Transit Week 2019's Ottawa Transit Challenge was an initiative of Free Transit Ottawa and co-sponsored by Ecology Ottawa, ATU Local 279, the Healthy Transportation Coalition, Ottawa Transit Riders, Carleton Student Energy, The Carleton Greens, Carleton University New Democrats, and Joel Harden - NDP.

## 5. After the Event

Finally, you may want to find a specific way to wrap up the challenge. A few ideas include:

- Releasing a report of your experiences
- Holding a press conference
- Announcing a new campaign
- Holding a demonstration

We opted for a press conference, which allowed councillors to share their experiences and gave us a platform to officially announce our goals and demands.