

# OC Transpo officials provide updates on LRT lines opening, bus plan's progress

JOANNE LAUCIUS

Portions of the LRT's Line 1 will be partly closed this summer after Bluesfest wraps up, Ottawa's transit commission heard Thursday.

Transit ridership is still lower than expected, but could bounce back in September with federal public servants then mandated to return to their offices three days a week.

Meanwhile, the best guess for the opening of the eastern extension of Line 1 is now summer or early fall 2025.

These were among the updates that senior OC Transpo officials offered members of the transit committee during its last meeting before Sept. 12.

Here are some of the new services in the works for transit users, plus some of the holdups and inconveniences riders are likely to see in coming months.

## OPENING LINE 1 EASTERN EXTENSION, LINES 2 AND 4

When this will happen is still a big question, and no firm dates were given Thursday.

According to OC Transpo's update, Line 2, running from Greenboro Station to Bayview Station, and Line 4, running from South Keys to the airport, will open in the third or fourth quarter of 2024.

Meanwhile, the Line 1 eastern extension won't open for at least more than a year.

OC Transpo general manager Renée Amilcar told the committee she wouldn't give any specific dates, but councillors continued to press for specifics.

Beacon Hill-Cyrville Coun. Tim Tierney asked Amilcar whether the Line 1 eastern extension would be open in time for the May 2025 annual general meeting of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which will draw thousands of delegates to Ottawa.

The short answer to that question was no, Amilcar replied. When pressed by Tierney, she said the opening would be in the summer of 2025, but could possibly be in September.

"But it will not be in May for sure," she said.

This is the second slippage in delivery time for the eastern extension and people are getting frustrated, Tierney said.

"People thought it would be service delivery in 2024. Then I heard first quarter of 2025. Now I'm hearing it will be after the sum-

mer of 2025. We have a message to deliver to our constituents, and that's a pretty big ballpark."

## NEW WAYS TO BUS

The opening of Lines 2 and 4 will be connected to New Ways to Bus, a bus network consisting of more than 100 routes.

OC Transpo said riders will "see a shift from downtown-focused bus routes to routes that improve connections to community hubs and key destinations."

It is also expected that some routes will be retired, but they will be replaced with alternative service nearby. There will be no changes to existing 300-series shopper routes and 400-series event routes. In some instances, there may be changes to 600-series school routes.

Riders will be hearing more about New Ways to Bus in the coming months. OC Transpo launched a web page in the fall of 2023 and published the future network map, as well as an email address so transit users could ask questions.

The launch is now in its preparation phase, where users can learn more specific details. A "travel planner preview" is to be launched later in June on octranspo.com, allowing transit users to simulate future trips and explore schedules for their new routes. The communications campaign will ramp up in the weeks leading to implementation.

There will also be changes to bus stop flags and posted information at about 5,000 bus stops. New and decommissioned bus stops will have information for transit users. The new bus stop flags will remain covered until just before the launch of the new bus network, at which point OC Transpo staff will go around the city and unveil the flags.

## APPROACHING TRACK, MAINTENANCE WORK

Annual track and maintenance work on Line 1 is scheduled for July 15-28, after Canada Day and Bluesfest. The maintenance will include regularly scheduled work plus continued work on leaks in downtown tunnels and stations.

For customers, this will mean a partial shutdown from Tunney's Pasture Station to Rideau Station. Line 1 will operate in both directions from Blair Station to uOttawa Station. During this time, R1 replacement bus service will run from Tunney's Pasture to Hurd-



OC Transpo expects to share details in coming months on its New Ways to Bus plan, which will pivot "from downtown-focused bus routes to routes that improve connections to community hubs and key destinations." JEAN LEVAC

man stations. E1 shuttle express bus service from Blair to Lyon will expand to all hours of the day.

Partial closings of Line 1 are also planned for October, but they will be scheduled in the evenings after 11:30 p.m. and on weekends.

At the end of 2023, work was completed in the east end to connect the tracks at Blair Station with the new extension. That work did not require partial shutdowns, but it did require some single-track operations. There will be additional partial closings involved with connecting to the new extension, including a partial shutdown from St-Laurent to Blair stations. The work is to take place over a few Sundays or late at night.

## RIDERSHIP LEVELS

OC Transpo reports ridership has been down 6.6 per cent in the first five months of this year compared to the forecast. Post-secondary students are returning to transit in pre-pandemic levels and the number of high-school students using the system has increased. The drop in ridership is due to a lower-than-expected number of adult riders travelling alone. Historically, these have been downtown office workers.

The return to work downtown

continues to be lower than expected, but recent federal government decisions requiring on-site work three days a week are expected to increase ridership. What that will look like depends on what days public service workers will be commuting, the transit committee heard.

Current OC Transpo usage totals about 200,000 trips a day. If public service workers return to work Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, it would increase by 20,000 trips a day, according to OC Transpo's rough estimates. If the return to work is spread out over five days, it would increase by 12,000 trips a day.

## ON-DEMAND BUS PILOT

A pilot project in Blackburn Hamlet that began Feb. 11 has tested the feasibility of on-demand bus service, allowing transit users to take trips in Blackburn Hamlet and to and from Blair Station and Gloucester Centre.

Under the pilot, bus riders booked same-day and next-day trips between select bus stops using a smartphone app or by calling OC Transpo customer service. The pilot project is scheduled to end June 23 with the regular fixed route 28 returning into service on June 24, but OC Transpo already con-

siders the project to be a success.

It is planning the next steps to expand on-demand services as part of the transit network, including other days and times as well as introducing on-demand to newer parts of the city where there may not be enough riders to provide fixed or regular service.

City council has already approved the purchase of 10 minibuses for on-demand services, and the vehicles are expected to be delivered in 2025. OC Transpo will be issuing a request for proposals for the software required to offer on-demand services on a larger scale.

Orléans West-Innes Coun. Laura Dudas told the transit committee she had used the on-demand system almost every weekend and her only disappointment was that the project was coming to an end.

"The on-demand has almost a neighbourly feel. We would be able to see the bus coming down the street. Numerous times the operator would see us, recognize that we were waving at them and they would pull over at the stop and wait," Dudas said.

"Yes, there were one or two blips here and there, but people felt it was a good opportunity to try something a little different."



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**Monday, June 17**  
**Joint Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Environment and Climate Change Committee**  
9:00 am, Andrew S. Haydon Hall / electronic participation

**Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services Committee**  
2:00 pm (or 15 minutes following the conclusion of the Joint Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Environment and Climate Change Committees' meeting, whichever is later), Andrew S. Haydon Hall / electronic participation

**Ottawa Board of Health**  
5 pm, Champlain Room / electronic participation

**Tuesday, June 18**  
**Environment and Climate Change Committee**  
9:30 am, Champlain Room / electronic participation

**Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee**  
4:00 pm, Colonel By Room / electronic participation

**Accessibility Advisory Committee**  
6:00 pm, electronic participation

**Wednesday, June 19**  
**Planning and Housing Committee**  
9:30 am, Champlain Room / electronic participation

**Thursday, June 20**  
**Joint Planning and Housing and Environment and Climate Change Committee**  
10:00 am, Andrew S. Haydon Hall / electronic participation

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