

City must put 'transit first,' roads second, Hume says

Councillors stress need to 'accelerate' rail plans to cope with congestion in south

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Several city councillors say Ottawa needs to build public transit rather than big new roads as a way to cope with growth and increased road congestion, especially in the southern end of the city.

The councillors were reacting to the possible widenings of several regional roads being proposed in the latest edition of city staff's transportation master plan. The plan, which includes a 25-year, \$4.7-billion transit plan, as well as \$2 billion worth of widened or new roads, goes to city councillors for debate in November and several councillors are concerned about the inclusion of so many large road projects.

One is the twinning of the Airport Parkway, a hugely controversial road expansion, which is in the most immediate phase of the city's construction plan.

Alta Vista Councillor Peter Hume, chairman of the planning and environment committee, says the city should not be building significant new roads for automobiles in the near future. He says this is especially true in new neighbourhoods like those in the south of Ottawa, where new residents are making choices about second cars and how to move around the city.

"You just have to say, 'Transit first'," said Mr. Hume. "We need to get that transit plan done and get it to Riverside South. If anything, we need to accelerate the plan."

The city's most likely proposed public-transit scenario includes commuter-rail service running east to Blair Station, through a tunnel downtown and south to Riverside South. The southern link has been criticized because Riverside South is sparsely populated so far, yet that part of the city doesn't have a lot of roads. Riverside South has about 7,000 residents, but is planned for 40,000 and could be expanded further if commuter rail service runs to it.

Bay Councillor Alex Cullen, chairman of council's transit committee, said doubling the size of the Airport Parkway will "undermine our investment in public transit." He said the city must ensure that it has good transit service to the south and that building more roads isn't the answer.



CREDIT: Rod MacIvor, The Ottawa Citizen
Alta Vista Councillor Peter Hume is among a group of councillors who say Ottawa needs to put public transit ahead of building more roads.

"When you add capacity, the cars will come," said Mr. Cullen, who noted that the northbound cars will be stuck in traffic at Bronson Avenue even if the Airport Parkway is expanded.

Capital Councillor Clive Doucet said council debated the north-south corridor for years and concluded there had to be good public transit to the south before entertaining any expansion of the parkway.

"We're right back to roads everywhere right now and transit planning off to some distant horizon," said Mr. Doucet. "We need to defer road construction until we have electric rail in place."

Gloucester-Southgate Councillor Diane Deans said widening the Airport Parkway is a result of the cancellation of the former north-south rail project, since the city's southern communities are growing and have few transportation options.

Kanata South Councillor Peggy Feltmate said the Airport Parkway project makes no sense when the city is planning to run an expensive electric rail service to the south.

The city is inviting comment from the public about its transit and road plans. Information is available on the Internet at www.ottawa.ca.

Staff Support Para Transpo Taxi Experiment

City transit staff are recommending continuation of a popular pilot project that sees the municipality subsidizing taxi trips for people who would otherwise use Para Transpo. The program started in July 2007 and is now used by 560 people with mobility problems. The results of the pilot project show selling coupons reduces the need for 8,000 Para Transpo trips per year, saves the city money, and greatly increases users' mobility. The issue will be dealt with by councillors on the transit committee next week, and Bay Councillor Alex Cullen, who chairs the committee, said it should continue.

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