

Defiance of Reason, Right from The Start

The Rapid Transit Expansion Study (RTES) Set the Tone by Boldly Defying “Technical or Economic Argument.”

Shame on me; shame on the citizens of Ottawa; shame on the local press; we all should have known better. Had we paid more attention all along, we might have understood that LRT decision-making in Ottawa is *above reason*, unencumbered by logic or common sense. It's not really about growing public transit use. It's not about building fewer roads. It's not about getting the best public transit bang for our taxpayer buck. It's certainly not about smart growth.

The July 2003 RTES report was the culmination of a process that led to the decision, among other things that, of all the ways to improve rapid transit in Ottawa, the North-South corridor, serving the needs of only 2.1% of all peak-hour commuters, was the most important. More important than the 174-417 corridor (which was not even assessed) and more important than solving the transit capacity crunch downtown.

However the key, but easily overlooked, insight into the true nature of RTES is to be found in Section 8 “Recommended Network Concept” on page 8.1:

“The Recommended Rapid Transit Network is a fusion of public values, technical analysis and the feasibility of future partnerships. The network provides broad coverage using a combination of Transitway bus rapid transit on existing corridors and new system light rail transit for emerging corridors. Decisions on the network were inspired by a sense of Community Identity and Vision, established and supported by community leaders, politicians, and civic administrators, and have more to do with community values and aspirations for the quality of life in the National Capital Region rather than with technical or economic argument.” (Underline added)

Notwithstanding the warm & fuzzy rhetorical preliminaries, what is this decision-making yardstick, “technical (and) economic argument” that the City so proudly decided to avoid? Frankly, it is everything by which we normally hold a government to account. Are they spending taxpayer money wisely, in ways can it be demonstrated to be effective, efficient and economical investments that achieve measurable and agreed-upon goals? Is the decision-making objective, logical and, to the degree it can be, fact-based?

To these questions, your mayor and Council said “No.” Their decision-making was not to be constrained by such pedestrian limitations. It is only through this distorted filter that the actions of this Mayor, this Council, and the staff they have directed, made any kind of sense: specifically, nonsense ... by design. They told us as much and then they voted on it. Now it is our turn to vote.

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