

## North South LRT Transit Ridership in Perspective

*Why the City's Cited Ridership Numbers are Deceptive and its Proposed North-South LRT Project is Largely Inconsequential to Ottawa's Transportation Needs and Objectives.*

Ottawa is growing in population and, as a result, so is its workforce. According to the City's Transportation Master Plan, between the years 2001 and 2021, the number of peak hour motorized commuter trips will increase by 122,000 to a total of 344,000.<sup>1</sup> A couple of definitions are in order.

§ "Peak hour" refers to the 60 minutes of the morning rush hour when the greatest number of commuters are traveling.

§ "Motorized commuter trips" refers to people commuting by bus, train or car. Of those traveling by car, it includes both drivers and passengers. It does not include people who walk or ride a bicycle to work.

Increasing the number of people who get to work by public transit is important because this reduces the city's road construction and repair expenditures and reduces greenhouse gas and smog emissions generated as a result of transportation in Ottawa.

The City's goal, as set out in its City's Transportation Master Plan and reiterated in current documents related to the North-South LRT project, is that 30% of all peak hour motorized commuter trips will travel by public transit by the year 2021.<sup>2</sup> This goal is ambitious but achievable. The current rate of peak hour transit use is 17%<sup>3</sup>, however several of Ottawa's transit corridors are currently near or in excess of the 30% target and this level of transit use is common in many European cities. To achieve this 30% objective, OC Transpo needs 67,000 new riders from the total of 122,000 extra commuters expected by 2021.<sup>4</sup>

According to the City's official but little-known ridership projections, the proposed North-South LRT will serve:

§ 7,320 peak hour riders,<sup>5</sup> representing 2.1% of all peak hour motorized commuters in Ottawa in 2021 (344,000). This means that the proposed North-South LRT corridor will only be relevant to 1 out of every 50 peak hour commuters in Ottawa, whether or not they choose to use it.

§ Of these 7,320 peak hour riders, fully 6,230 riders<sup>6</sup> would have otherwise taken the bus or the O-Train at service levels equivalent to those currently provided. For these riders, all that is accomplished after the \$800 million project is simply to switch them from buses to the proposed LRT.

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<sup>1</sup> The Transportation Master Plan, City of Ottawa, September 2003, page 23 Figure 3.5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page ii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 23 Figure 3.5. Peak hour transit ridership is to grow 67,000 from 37,000 to 104,000. Total peak hour motorized trips will grow 122,000 from 222,000 to 344,000.

<sup>5</sup> North-South Corridor Light Rail Transit Project Ridership Study, IBI Group, February 2005, page 81.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 81.

§ The remaining, only 1,090 peak hour riders<sup>7</sup> will be what are known as *net new riders*. These people are the total number of riders expected to be attracted to use the service instead of commuting by car. This number represents 1.6% of the 67,000 riders OC Transpo needs to make its 2021 objectives. This number of riders means that, as a result of the proposed project, less than 900 cars that will be off the road that would have been the case if the project did not proceed.

The City's submissions to Council, and its Federal and Provincial funding partners, have entirely ignored these numbers and this simple analysis. They merely talk about projected daily ridership levels of 60,000 to 70,000.<sup>8</sup> While daily ridership numbers are of interest, they are largely irrelevant from a transportation or environmental planning perspective.

The reason the City only talks about daily ridership is simply because it is a larger number that sounds more impressive. In truth, it is a deceptive number that hides how little will be achieved by the proposed North-South LRT project and how minor its role is in Ottawa's overall commuter congestion.

Serving the transit needs of people who commute along the North-South corridor is important. The point is that these needs can be easily met by other means at far less of a cost.<sup>9</sup> The City has a windfall in the form of \$400 million in assistance from the governments of Ontario and Canada. To use all of this money on an \$800+ million project that is relevant to only 2.1% of Ottawa's commuters, and achieve only 1.6% of the new riders OC Transpo must attract out of their cars, represents an atrocious disregard of both sound transportation planning and fiscal common sense.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, page 81.

<sup>8</sup> North-South Corridor LRT Project (Rideau Centre to Barrhaven Town Centre) CEAA Environmental Assessment Report, March 2006, page iv.

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://ottawalrt.blogspot.com/2006/07/practical-north-south-lrt-alternative.html>