

# Questions, Questions, and More Questions About Ottawa's LRT Plan, 2009 Edition

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**Barry Wellar\***

## **1. Background**

Over the past nine years the City of Ottawa's light rail transit (LRT) plans have undergone many twists and turns, starts and stops, re-starts and re-stops, as well as numerous ups and downs, and as demonstrated by hundreds of media items, a great deal of second-guessing, third-guessing, and fourth-guessing.

Consequently, many area residents have limited confidence in what municipal politicians say about such matters as route locations, timing and sequencing of system segments, integration of land use and transportation planning, costs and benefits of alternative transit choices (e.g., downtown tunnel or surface), transit system financing, intermodal integration, levels of service, and levels of use.

Similarly, there does not appear to be much public confidence in what staff and consultants presented in prior years and are presenting now in the way of analytical studies. Moreover, comments by staff and consultants about the implications of those studies seemingly did not find and currently are not finding a receptive public audience.

Confidence, it seems, is a word that seldom crossed the minds of citizens in relation to any aspect of activity involving the proposed North-South light rail transit program. (I am not including the O-Train project in the assessment.) Moreover, switching directions to an East-West alignment does not seem to have done much to boost public confidence.

In response to inquiries from the media, community and business groups, university students, and residents about the cancellation of the North-South (N-S) contract with Siemens, and the seemingly chaotic re-launch of the search by the City of Ottawa for an "improved" LRT plan and program, I decided in 2007 to write two papers rather than make presentations. The papers outline what mayor and council should do to correct the credibility problem, with emphasis on the city developing a methodologically-sound basis to support its positions, promises, pledges, proposals, etc.

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\* As Distinguished Research Fellow, Dr. Barry Wellar writes on various topics that are pertinent to the Transport 2000 Canada mission to promote environmentally-sound transportation solutions. In this report about the light rail transit program in Ottawa, he discusses a number of issues that are of interest to Transport 2000 Canada members, including sustainable transport best practices, public participation, decision processes, and research methodology.

By way of brief elaboration on the choice of papers over presentations, this approach reflects due regard for the matter of documentation. Simply put, in public undertakings some things go right and some things go wrong, and questions often arise about the why's and how's, and who did what, when. One of the strengths of the methodological approach is that because it explicitly includes compiling a record of events and decisions, the documentation can be reviewed and credit for things gone right and blame for things gone wrong can be fully and fairly assigned.

It warrants noting here, and is repeated later, that politicians and civil servants who do not want to be held accountable for their actions oppose this approach. However, their objections merely underscore why documents rather than unrecorded presentations are an appropriate way for me to comment on the seemingly bungled City of Ottawa LRT file.

In sections 2 and 3, I briefly re-visit the prior reports in which I offered advice/recommendations to mayor and council regarding several things they should do to lift the malaise that was settling over Ottawa's transportation scene in general and the LRT program in particular. For the purposes of this report, and the historical record of who said or did what, I briefly comment on the disposition of the papers in two respects:

- 1) Feedback from mayor and members of council to the advice/recommendations tendered;
- 2) My perception as to whether the advice/recommendations were acted upon, and the consequences.

These brief re-visits to the two earlier papers provide a basis for the main body of the present paper *Questions, Questions, and More Questions about Ottawa's LRT Plan, 2009 Edition*. As shown in sections 5 and 6, I recently submitted two sets of questions about the 2009 edition of the LRT program to Ottawa councillors, and most notably to members of the Transit Committee. The intent of the questions is to ascertain the reasoning process behind two major features of the LRT program, namely:

- **Using the Western Parkway (which is under the authority of the National capital Commission) for part of the LRT system west of downtown Ottawa; and,**
- **Traversing downtown Ottawa by underground tunnel or by surface.**

I close this Background section by underlining the importance of asking questions along the lines of what is done in this report, and especially in the Ottawa situation. As revealed in hundreds of media items, and heard at dozens of committee and council meetings at Ottawa city hall, numerous questions have been asked and statements made in the years after 1999 about the Ottawa region's Transitway program of the 1970s and 19780s.

Indeed, questions are still being asked in 2009 about transit-related questions that were asked or should have been asked 30 years ago. By extension, therefore, it is highly likely if not certain, that in 20, 30, 40, and 50 years or more, questions will also be asked about the questions involving LRT that were asked in 2009, and the answers received. Or, alternatively, even more significant questions could be raised about questions asked and not answered. (The matter of questions not asked is the topic of a report under consideration for later this year.)

It is my hope, therefore, that an organization such as the Federation of Citizens Associations will give favourable consideration to serving as a repository of questions sent by citizens to elected officials and professional staff about LRT-related issues, problems, and concerns.

## **2. Five Steps to Get Ottawa Out of Its Transportation Mess**

The five-step report was published as a column in *The News EMC*, December 13, 2007, and a scanned version of the article was posted January 18, 2008 on the Transport 2000 Canada website (<http://www.transport2000.ca/>). The full statement, including comments about each of the five steps, is available for examination, so only the directive in each step is repeated in this report. A red font is used to highlight the proposed steps.

***Step number one in the remedial process is quite simple, but its importance cannot be over-emphasized. That is, all maps of Ottawa, as well as sheets of blank paper, crayons and other drawing materials must be declared off limits to mayor and councillors beginning immediately.***

**Comment.** Supportive comments were received from a half-dozen councillors who agreed in principle with the concern that serious thinking should precede casual drawing and colouring for media photo ops. However, members of council are still drawing maps, seemingly willy-nilly and with limited forethought. Council's credibility is not served by this shallow, self-serving approach to decision-making.

***Step number two requires that mayor and councillors drop any semblance of swagger when it comes to transportation planning discussions and decisions. On the evidence of the past year, they have a very weak grasp of how to even perceive the inputs and outputs of the transportation planning process, much less how to intelligently query, direct, and use staff and consultants, or how to define and negotiate multi-million dollar contracts that have huge economic, financial, and legal implications.***

**Comment.** A half-dozen councillors agreed that mayor and council should be more modest, since they have done little that justifies swaggering. And as for the "weak grasp" criticism, it was also accepted as being accurate.

It is now 17 months since the community newspaper article appeared, and there have been plenty of opportunities for mayor and council to demonstrate that they

have a solid handle on the transportation planning process. Examination of city documents and media reports, and analysis of discourse at committee and council meetings regarding the transportation file, failed to yield any publicly available evidence to suggest that mayor and councillors have improved their collective grasp of the inputs and outputs of the transportation planning process, or how to intelligently query, direct, and use staff and consultants, or how to define and negotiate multi-million dollar contracts that have huge economic, financial, and legal implications.

In summary, critical comments in community and daily newspapers, and in television programs such as Talk Ottawa (Rogers), indicate that while the swaggering notion has pretty much vaporized, the credibility of council on the LRT file remains on the low, low side of public expectations.

***Third, before committing to an expenditure of \$400-\$600 million on downtown tunnels for light rail and/or buses, and perhaps upwards of \$800 million if the digging proves difficult, mayor and councillors need to obtain the multi-part answer to a fundamental question that should have been asked and answered in detail years ago. That is, what are the assumptions, premises, conditions, and objectives associated with the tunnel option?***

**Comment.** It is my recollection that only two councillors responded directly to remedial step three, and they agreed that Ottawa council does not function with a “research mindset”. And, it is my further recollection that several members of council have asked public questions or made public statements that partially address the assumptions, premises, conditions, and objectives associated with the tunnel option. However, to my knowledge there is no methodologically-derived City of Ottawa position in any of those regards in particular, much less for all of them as a package.

As a consequence of the seeming absence of a substantive context for announcements or pronouncements, the mayor, councillors, and council as a whole are generally seen to be “making it up as they go along”, which promotes further criticism and further loss of credibility among citizens.

***Fourth, there is ample evidence that mayor and councillors are way, way behind in their reading on the large changes occurring in the transportation world. Further, they need to wrap their brains around the idea that Ottawa in 2017 will most likely be very different from Ottawa in 2007.***

**Comment.** No feedback has been received in regard to step four. Over the past 17 months I have encountered no evidence to suggest that the mayor or councillors as a whole have made any progress in their reading about or understanding of fundamental changes occurring in the urban transportation field. Moreover, and in a way that would illustrate external recognition of significant progress, I have yet to learn of a national or international conference at which any elected official (or member of staff for that matter) from the City of Ottawa has been invited to

demonstrate his/her deep thinking in the field of transportation in general, or the LRT component in particular.

The apparent failure over the past decade for the City of Ottawa to present one leading edge idea, or even one relatively bright, new idea involving transit in general and LRT in particular, does not inspire confidence that the city's elected officials and professional staff are getting any traction in the climb up the transportation learning curve. As a result, transit-related announcements and pronouncements from city hall are generally received with skepticism, and are accorded little public support.

***The fifth stage in the remedial process has its roots in the newspaper article [Ottawa Citizen] written 32 years ago, and the sustainable transport presentations in 2007 to the Kiwanis Club of Ottawa (February), the Association of American Geographers in San Francisco (April), and the National TravelWise Association in Belfast, Northern Ireland (November). (Note: These materials are publications by Barry Wellar, and are posted on the Transport 2000 Canada website.)***

***In the few minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour that remain for mayor and councillors, I suggest that they spend every available moment in the cram mode, trying their utmost to comprehend the meaning of sustainable transport best practices, and then developing a rational process of identifying, adopting, and implementing a strategic selection of these practices as the core component of a transportation master plan.***

**Comment.** Minimal feedback has been received in regard to step five. I have observed the term "sustainable" in City of Ottawa documents, and a small selection of councillors occasionally use the term "sustainable" in public remarks. However, when it comes to actually putting sustainable transport practices into practice, or employing sustainable transport practices as a basis of querying, directing, or using staff in order to make more informed LRT-related decisions, it is my impression that Ottawa council as a whole has made little if any progress over the past 17 months.

Indeed, there is considerable evidence to support the argument that Ottawa has gone in the opposite direction in the past several years, and actually engaged in a number of initiatives that contradict the City of Ottawa's avowed interest in sustainable transport.

The net result of this inaction on the sustainable transport front is two-fold. First, there appears to be a widespread sense that the City of Ottawa has not progressed beyond a very limited grasp of what the phrase "sustainable transport best practice" means in general, much less across all modes. And second, in my travels, meetings, discussions, etc., as well as through daily reviews of media stories and Internet communications, I have not met even one person in the Ottawa area who contends that there is a passing hope that within the next decade the City of Ottawa will develop "... a rational process of identifying, adopting, and implementing a strategic selection of these practices as the core component of a transportation master plan."

### **3. An Advisory to Council About Solving Ottawa's Transportation Mess**

After the article in *The News EMC* was published, I received requests from community associations, students, and members of the media in Ottawa and other cities to write a more detailed commentary based on the five steps. The extended version, *An Advisory to Council About Solving Ottawa's Transportation Mess*, was posted January 18, 2008 on the Transport 2000 Canada website, and is available for examination at <http://www.transport2000.ca/>.

The five steps have already been covered in sufficient depth for this paper, and anyone interested in the additional details can read the *Advisory*. The focus here is on several other observations and recommendations in the *Advisory* which contribute to a foundation for the questions in sections 5 and 6. A selection of these advisements are recalled and briefly considered as further context for the questions. A red font is used to highlight the three advisements selected from the *Advisory*.

#### **1. Respecting grassroots organizations in the research process**

*Since it is obviously wasteful and dysfunctional in the extreme that this expertise [community groups] is not being effectively used, the Advisory seeks to galvanize council to mend its relations with grassroots organizations, and to earnestly seek whatever help it can get from these groups to deal with Ottawa's widespread and deeply-rooted transportation mess.*

**Comment.** The generally perceived inferior quality of communication between mayor and council, and among councillors, may be a contributing factor, but over the past 17 months it appears fair to say that community groups have become extremely marginalized. The loss of community group expertise and support is incalculable, and in my opinion is a major reason behind the width and depth of Ottawa's transportation mess.

**(Note.** For anyone who wishes to challenge whether community groups have been marginalized with regard to the transit/LRT file, I have a suggestion. Contact the chairs of the Transit Committee and the Transportation Committee and ask them for the list of questions that the Committees, the mayor and individual councillors, as well as staff and consultants, have put to community groups over the past 17 months. If you receive a reply to the inquiry within a month, that will be cause for elation. If you receive any evidence of questions having been asked, that will be cause for celebration, and I welcome the materials being forwarded to me for my edification.)

The nub of the matter is that the N-S LRT process, including the public information and communication aspect, is widely deemed to have been a shambles, and there is every good reason to expect that the current council with demonstrably limited transportation expertise would welcome informed assistance from community groups. The perceived, continuing failure of Ottawa's mayor and councillors to take advantage of that resource not only points to a high degree of arrogance on the parts

of mayor and councillors as well as staff and consultants, but it paints a disconcerting picture about the level of official thinking behind Ottawa's transit/LRT file.

Simply put, we are in the third year of the current council's term, and the planning and design phases of a 4-6 billion dollar LRT system are widely perceived as incoherent, fractured, ambiguous, etc. And yet, despite that seemingly low level of achievement, nothing substantive appears to be happening in terms of reaching out and incorporating the expertise and experience of community groups in meaningful ways in this critical phase of the transit/LRT program.

I note for the record, and perhaps for the information of Ottawa's mayor and council, that the practice of holding "Open Houses" has long lost much of the credibility it once had as a means of informing and listening to the public. And as for its use in dealing with complex issues in the transportation domain, the words "fraud" and "exercise in futility" are often associated with so-called Open Houses. If mayor and council do decide that they want to productively engage community associations in transit (LRT, BRT), then I suggest they instruct staff to do better than trying the Open House routine, and especially in cases involving community associations whose members have considerably more transportation expertise than any members of council, and as much or more than some of the consultants that staff hire to do some of the heavy mental lifting.

## **2. Can council make the necessary connections?**

***That is, the mayor and councillors must figure out how to effectively and efficiently connect client-driven and curiosity-driven research methodologies in a transportation planning environment, and then intelligently apply that methodology in a comprehensive review of the research offerings of Ottawa's grassroots organizations. Upon satisfactorily completing those two preparatory rounds, and adopting a research mindset to guide future deliberations, mayor and councillors then need to build on what has been learned in the first two rounds. That is, using what they have learned about the formal research process, it is then necessary to derive the questions which must be asked and answered if the mayor and councillors are to sort out and begin to solve Ottawa's current transportation mess, and prevent further monumental bungles.***

**Comment.** As the Principal Investigator for the recently-completed Transport Canada project, ***Methodologies for Identifying and Ranking Sustainable Transport Practices in Urban Regions***, I am pleased to note that the City of Ottawa responded to the survey of the methodologies, methods, and techniques that are used to make decisions to identify, adopt, and implement sustainable transport practices. The city's response is contained in the report, ***Municipal Government Responses to the Survey about Methodologies, Methods, and Techniques that Are Used to Make Decisions about Sustainable Transport Practices***. It can be viewed at <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>.

As readers are no doubt aware, Ottawa's LRT program is a technically difficult enterprise which cuts across multiple disciplines (e.g., engineering, geography, geology, mathematics, statistics, economics, operations research, management sciences, resource management, sociology, demography, logistics, planning, architecture, systems sciences, geomatics, surveying, hydrology, earth sciences, municipal finance, and environmental studies). Further, in terms of scope, over the planning, design, construction, and evaluation phases it could easily involve using considerably more than the 42 research methods and techniques that are listed for illustrative purposes in the Transport Canada project reports.

For professional reasons I am not commenting on the specific responses to the survey by municipalities, including the response submitted on behalf of the City of Ottawa. However, a general comment can be made which is pertinent to this paper.

It is my impression that a number of members of City of Ottawa staff work with many of the methods and techniques cited in the Transport Canada reports. However, it appears that the same cannot be said for elected officials. Based on what I have observed at committee and council meetings, and what I have read in newspaper accounts and councillors' monthly messages over the past 17 months, very few if any members of council including the mayor have taken courses or received formal training in methods and techniques in any field, much less multiple fields.

Rather, it is my impression, they are much more attuned to a research method that was created for the Transport Canada project with municipal politicians in mind. The method is titled "Anatomical Sourcing", and it encompasses the parts of the body that in my experience are frequently attributed to politicians as the sources, bases, or inspirations for many of their decisions. Cases in point include "top of the head", "knee-jerk reaction", "gut feeling", "off the cuff," and "seat of the pants".

In the absence of being informed that mayor and councillors have been taking research methods and techniques courses, seminars, and/or workshops, refresher or otherwise, it is my inclination to believe that Anatomical Sourcing actually is the primary means of decision making by more than a few City of Ottawa politicians. And, that being the case to a greater or even lesser degree, the question arises:

If mayor and council have limited training in research methods and techniques, and limited understanding of how to use research methods and techniques, what is the likelihood that they fully understand the analyses and outcomes associated with the 30 to 50 or more methods and techniques that could be used during the course of the LRT program for feasibility, design, analysis, synthesis, implementation, evaluation, *ex ante* impact assessment, *ex poste* impact assessment, and other kinds of studies?

Over the past 17 months I have not detected any increase in the methodological strengths of the mayor or councillors, and I am not aware of plans by mayor and councillors to take courses, seminars, workshops, or other training means to improve

their methodological underpinnings. As a result, I am obliged to conclude that mayor and council have yet to acquire the competency “... *to derive the questions which must be asked and answered if the mayor and councillors are to sort out and begin to solve Ottawa's current transportation mess, and prevent further monumental bumbles.*”

### **3. Mayor and councillors read anything about holes in the EA process?**

**Comment.** Seventeen months ago the *Advisory* cautioned mayor and councillors about the holes in the environmental assessment (EA) process. As an example of the holes, it was pointed out that EAs were done for many of the road widenings that have gotten Ottawa into its current transportation mess. It would seem reasonable to expect, therefore, that any thinking person would reject the EA process as the basis to justify much of anything involving transportation, given its colossal failure to identify road widenings as an assault on the physical environment as well as an affront to the principles and practices of sustainability.

To assist them in their thinking, I suggested that mayor and council contact the Province of Ontario and obtain some EA-related information in regard to the widening of sections of Highway 174 as well as more sections of 417:

**“Obtain from the Province of Ontario a clear, timely, evidence-based, and comprehensive explanation as to how adding more private motor vehicles to Ottawa's urban transportation network is good for Ottawa's environment, or its inhabitants.”**

To my knowledge mayor and councillors never took that advice, and to my knowledge they have not investigated the holes in the EA process. What they have done, with few exceptions in the council group coming to mind, is to continue to portray the EA process as if it holds some sort of absolute, divine truth.

However, and this has been widely known for years, the EA process is critically flawed when used in transportation situations, which raises serious questions about the integrity and motives of those who persist in attempting to present the EA process as an informative decision-making tool in the transportation field.

At a minimum, therefore, any mention of “the EA process” should be a red flag for area residents who currently and in future will bear the brunt of the problems arising from the mis-application of the EA tool.

## **4. From Advisories to Questions**

Based upon their performance to date, it seems to be evident that Ottawa's councils between 2000 and 2009 are best graded as under-achievers when it comes to the transportation file in general and the transit/LRT component in particular. Overall, I believe it is fair to say that they were unprepared when they opened the file nine years ago, they have done little if any remedial work in the interim to improve their appreciation of the file, and the prospects for things changing for the better from sources within city hall appear to be slim, exceedingly slim.

Which prompts the question, What to do, what to do?

Since there is always the hope that some external force will come to the rescue, one option is to wait for the federal government (including the National Capital Commission) and/or the provincial government to sort out the mess, or at least parts of the mess. During the N-S debate the federal government did in fact intervene, and during the current E-W debate both the federal and provincial governments, and the National Capital Commission (NCC) have made noises about LRT concerns.

However, since the City of Ottawa seems to be continuing with its muddling though approach, the noises made by the federal and provincial governments, and by the NCC, are construed by many observers to be little more than posturing at this stage. A common theme in conversations is that citizens should not hold their breath waiting for senior governments to sort out problems which are created by Ottawa's mayor and councillors. That said, there is always hope that an informed intervention could occur.

As for other external forces that could come to the rescue, they include a public uprising led by community and advocacy groups, and the media could also step up to the plate by mounting an effective challenge to the way that the transportation/LRT file is unfolding at Ottawa city hall. After all, a municipal election is less than two years away, and perhaps some media heat could help municipal politicians see the light when it comes to figuring out how to effectively and efficiently identify, adopt, and implement sustainable transport practices across the entire transportation system, and especially the transit/LRT mode.

To return to the question, What to do, what to do?, I suggest that the answer lies in part in sharp, edgy questions that can be used by federal and provincial governments, including the NCC, as well as by citizens and the media to penetrate the ambiguous thought, and ineffective informing/communicating processes, that are currently driving the transit/LRT discourse at Ottawa city hall. In the next two sections I present the questions which have been submitted in regard to the Western Parkway and downtown tunnel issues, along with feedback or comments that could assist those who pursue the questions with elected officials or staff.

## 5. LRT on Western Parkway Questions

The following email was sent on October 1, 2008 to councillors on the Transit Committee, and it was sent October 2, 2008 to mayor Larry O'Brien.

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**From:** Barry Wellar [mailto:wellarb@uottawa.ca]  
**Sent:** October 1, 2008 10:07 PM  
**To:** 'Georges.Bedard@ottawa.ca'; 'Rainer.Bloess@ottawa.ca'; Clive Doucet; (Christine.Leadman@ottawa.ca); 'Jacques.Legendre@ottawa.ca'; 'MariaMcrae@ottawa.ca'; 'Doug.Thompson@ottawa.ca'; 'Alex.Cullen@ottawa.ca'; 'Marianne.Wilkinson@ottawa.ca'  
**Subject:** Access to the Evidence Used to Support the Argument for Putting an LRT line in the Ottawa River Parkway

Transit Committee  
City of Ottawa

### **Re: Access to Evidence Used to Support the Argument for Putting an LRT line in the Ottawa River Parkway**

Dear Transit Committee Members,

During the LRT deliberations by the previous council there were numerous blunders that contributed to the downfall of the LRT initiative. In my opinion two of them are once again making their presence felt.

First, amidst the previous LRT scramble, it was a common practice of elected officials and staff to make seemingly authoritative statements, but which turned out to be mere opinions unsupported by even a shred of factual, verifiable, reproducible, empirical evidence. In short, they were blowing smoke. Regrettably, it seems to me that council and staff are doing exactly the same thing this time. With a minimum of four billion dollars (\$4, 000,000,000) apparently on the transportation and land use table, we are in the midst of deliberations that will have a massive impact on the City of Ottawa and the National Capital Region for the next 100 years or more. However, and despite the high stakes, once again City of Ottawa politicians and staff appear to me to be way out in front of any factual, verifiable, reproducible, empirical evidence to support the pronouncements.

Second, the public consultation process was frequently blistered by members of the public for being too little, too late when it came to providing pertinent, comprehensive information in a timely manner, and allowing for deep questioning of staff and consultants by citizens and their representatives. And, I hasten to add, some of this irritation was due to pronouncements by politicians and staff who were acting as though they had evidence that the public had not seen, and patronizingly intimated that citizens should "trust us". Well, we all know where that approach got us, and are still waiting to learn about how much more it is going to cost Ottawa taxpayers [to settle the Siemens lawsuit].

I have written a two-page statement about the Ottawa River Parkway situation, and it is attached. The statement includes a half-dozen or so questions.

I am asking for access to the evidence that the City of Ottawa has in hand in regard to the issues raised in the questions. Given the pronouncements that have been reported in the media, I wish to ascertain whether the evidence exists to support the pronouncements. And, as per the statement, I am asking for access via online sources. Indeed, the links may already exist, and it may be testimony to my limited Internet search skills that I have not been able to access the documents. If that is the case, and the links are already established, then please so advise and I can get on with my review.

I note and emphasize in closing that I am not seeking explanations of any kind, and I do not wish to receive any emails containing opinions, preferences, ruminations, exhortations, etc. I just want to know how to access the online materials pertinent to the questions contained in the attachment.

Your timely and effective assistance in his regard will be most appreciated.

Barry Wellar

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The following statement containing one or more questions on six issues was attached to the email sent to the mayor and councillors.

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### **Is the Parkway the Right Way for LRT? Prove It!**

During the deliberations about the Transitway in the 1970s I served as a member of the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Rapid Transit that was created to provide advice on the location of the Transitway route. At that time, numerous arguments were made in opposition to using the Parkway.

In 2008, thirty years later, we are once again witness to members of council and city staff trying to negotiate a perceived free ride on the Parkway, this time for light rail rather than bus.

In my review of statements favouring the Parkway, I carefully watch for pertinent, significant evidence. To date, the watch has been in vain. I have read many statements, but they are merely personal opinings, expressions of druthers, and off-the-top-of-the-head ramblings. I have not encountered any factual, empirical evidence to suggest that there is an economic, geographic, financial, environmental, engineering, geological, planning, hydrological, or other case for considering the Parkway as a fourth, fifth, sixth or tenth place choice for a light rail route west of downtown.

To assist the proponents of the Parkway route in putting their evidence on the table, I have eight straightforward questions for them to answer. Given their assertive claims about the Parkway being the preferred choice, they will no doubt already have considered these questions, and now it is just a matter of sharing the unadulterated answers with taxpayers.

The questions and brief context remarks are as follows, and I invite elected officials and appointed officials, including consultants hired by the City of Ottawa, to provide the answers to anyone who asks for them. I hasten to add that I use the Bronson-Carling route solely for illustrative purposes.

### **1. Passengers to pay for the operating costs?**

There may be several hundred per day on the Parkway, but there are many thousands along Bronson and Carling. And, they use transit all day, not just for the morning and evening commutes. **Question:** What are the passenger loading figures that you have calculated for all the potential west-of-downtown lines for the initial 30 years of LRT service?

### **2. Rezoning land for urban development to help pay for the transit costs?**

There is apparently zero chance of this along the Parkway, but many dozens of parcels along Bronson and Carling are candidates without ruining neighbourhoods or the environment. **Question:** What is the potential for rezoning light rail-associated properties along the Parkway and other routes west of downtown? **Question:** What are the associated revenues from each route that could be generated to offset light rail system capital costs for the initial 30 years of LRT service?

### **3. Streets to remove from car use when light rail is built?**

Zero along the Parkway, but many street sections along Bronson and Carling can be closed and turned into parks, walking paths, and even housing through re-zoning. This idea is in a newspaper column in the Ottawa Citizen that I wrote in 1975. Ottawa is long overdue to move forward with that idea, not just mindlessly expand the transportation network. Building transit lines without removing costly roads is not sustainability. **Question:** Over the course of 30 years after installation of the LRT system, how many street segments could be converted to which kinds of alternative uses, and how could those changes serve and promote light rail-based sustainable transport in Ottawa? **Question:** Over the course of 30 years after installation of the LRT system, what will be the net financial gain realized by the City of Ottawa as a result of taking street segments out of the road network in areas proximal to the respective LRT routes currently under consideration?

### **4. Opportunities to live in an apartment within an easy walk of light rail?**

Very limited along the Parkway, but that reality already exists along Bronson and Carling, and there is huge potential to increase the number of apartment units close to light rail on Bronson and Carling. **Question:** What is the potential for increasing the number of apartment units proximal to the respective LRT routes under consideration west of downtown?

## 5. Connection to the O-Train?

Currently it is a long, long walk if the LRT line is in the Parkway, but excellent on Carling a block from Preston. **Question:** What are the economic, financial, environmental, and operational costs and benefits of linking each alternative route under consideration to the O-Train line?

## 6. Stations?

There is not a good place for even one station on the Parkway, but there are many excellent locations for stations along Bronson and Carling near schools, government buildings, Dow's Lake, the Civic, the Experimental Farm, the Royal Ottawa, shopping centres, retail districts, residential areas, and business parks. **Question:** What are the economic, financial, environmental, and operational costs and benefits associated with station construction for the respective routes west of downtown?

I look forward to gaining access to the factual evidence that the City of Ottawa no doubt has assembled to answer questions such as these, and I presume the evidence is available online. Please provide access instructions by emailing me at [wellarb@uottawa.ca](mailto:wellarb@uottawa.ca).

Barry Wellar  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Ottawa

September 28, 2008

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**Comment.** As of this date, June 14, 2009, which is more than eight months after the questions were submitted to councillors and the mayor, I have not received answers from the City of Ottawa to any of them. Further, it is not known to me whether the questions have been presented to staff by a member or members of council (including the mayor), whether they have been discussed among members of council in a public forum, or whether any member of council or staff even understands the questions.

I hasten to add that while I have received communications from several councillors in regard to the Western Parkway issue, they did not include answers to the questions asked.

Further, the Western Parkway materials were also copied to officials in the federal government, the National Capital Commission, and the Government of Ontario. To date I have received what amount to courtesy replies, and requests about prior correspondence, and requests to send copies of future correspondence, but no answers to the questions asked.

It was my expectation that most if not all of these questions would have been asked and answered during the early stages of the aborted N-S program that ran from 2000 to 2006, and any questions that had not been asked and answered during the N-S debate would have been addressed at the outset of the E-W debate. The failure of

the mayor or any councillor to provide the answers to questions asked eight months ago, and mentioned many times in the media in the interim, suggest that the answers to those fundamental questions do not exist.

That being the case, how does one explain the City of Ottawa's position of vigorously proposing the Western Parkway as a segment of the LRT line west of downtown? Perhaps John Baird, federal Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities, or Jim Watson, provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, or Russell Mills, Chairman of NCC, could do some leaning on the City of Ottawa and obtain the overdue explanation. Or, perhaps, one of Ottawa's journalists could obtain the answers.

I note in this regard that the longer the delay in getting answers, the higher the likelihood that no one with the answers will be around to provide them. It is my experience that history is not kind to those in authority who fail to ask the questions that need to be asked when they need to be asked. *Carpe diem!*

## **6. Downtown LRT Tunnel or Surface Questions**

This communication was sent to the Transit Committee, City of Ottawa, in the search for answers to questions that could arise in association with a presentation and discussions at the 2009 International Conference, Canadian Operational Research Society/Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (CORS/INFORMS) in Toronto, June 14-17.

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**From:** Barry Wellar [mailto:wellarb@uottawa.ca]  
**Sent:** May 18, 2009 11:42 AM  
**To:** 'Alex.Cullen@ottawa.ca'  
**Cc:** 'Wilkinson, Marianne'; 'Bedard@ottawa.ca'; 'Rainer.Bloess@ottawa.ca'; 'Leadman, Christine'; 'Doug.Thompson@ottawa.ca'; 'Maria McRae'; 'Clive Doucet'; 'Jacques.Legendre@ottawa.ca'; 'Michel.Bellemare@ottawa.ca'  
**Subject:** Ottawa's LRT Program -- Questions  
**Importance:** High

Alex Cullen, Chair  
Transit Committee  
City of Ottawa

Dear Alex,

I will be presenting an invited paper, "OR and MS Inputs to Decisions about Sustainable Transport Practices", at the 2009 International Conference, Canadian Operational Research Society/Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (CORS/INFORMS) in Toronto, June 14-17. My co-author is William Garrison, Professor Emeritus, Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of California at Berkeley.

In addition, as part of the discussions in the conference track on Sustainable Transport Planning and Assessment, I have been asked to comment on future research plans arising from the Transport Canada project on how municipal governments make decisions regarding sustainable transport practices.

In preparation for these assignments some background work is necessary, and I have prepared a brief list of questions that you may be able to answer directly on behalf of the Transit Committee and/or the City of Ottawa, or which you may choose to refer to staff for the response(s). The questions are attached.

I look forward to receiving the responses to the questions at your earliest convenience, and/or that of the staff person(s) designated to attend to this request for information about the LRT program. I hasten to add in the interests of time, that it is preferred to have the responses sent independently rather than wait for the total package to be assembled.

Thank you for your assistance.  
Barry

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LRT PROGRAM  
CITY OF OTTAWA**

1. What is the current “congestion level” on streets in downtown Ottawa that were considered as potential surface LRT routes?
2. What is the “congestion level” standard that was used to reject the surface option, and what is the source of this standard?
3. What studies were undertaken to establish that the “congestion level” standard could be achieved on the potential surface route(s)?
4. What studies were undertaken to establish that the “congestion level” standard could not be achieved on the potential route(s)?
5. On the assumption that one or more of the surface routes could meet the “congestion level” standard, what is the difference in projected capital costs between the surface routes and the tunnel route?
6. Was this difference in capital costs considered in studies that led to recommending or choosing the tunnel option?
7. How many kilometres of surface LRT could be built with the difference in the projected capital costs between the surface and tunnel options in downtown Ottawa?
8. What is the projected length of time in months required to complete the downtown tunnel segment of the LRT system?

9. What is the projected length of time in months required to construct a downtown surface route segment of the LRT system?
10. In what ways has a sustainable transport test been used in Ottawa's LRT studies and decisions to date?

Barry Wellar  
613-728-3483  
[wellarb@uottawa.ca](mailto:wellarb@uottawa.ca)

May 17, 2009

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**Comment.** As of June 14 no answer to any of the questions has been received from Alex Cullen, any other councillor, the acting mayor, or any member of staff, which is cause for puzzlement. That is, all the questions should have been asked and answered four or five or more years ago during the N-S LRT phase, so the failure to respond in 2009 to most of the questions in a matter of minutes is a red flag, a large red flag.

Simply put, and in my experience, when politicians at any level have answers to questions they are generally very happy to share them with as wide an audience as can be reached. A case in point is the frequency with which many elected officials express their opinions, views, etc., via media interviews, media items including their own newspaper columns, as well as by means of householders, blogs, chat groups, etc.

Under the circumstances, and until apprised otherwise, I am obliged to inform conference attendees, discussion participants, and viewers of this paper when it is posted on various websites, that I do not believe that the City of Ottawa has the answers to these questions, much less to the questions that were to follow in the second round of probing into the thinking behind the downtown portion of the LRT program 2009 edition.

However, I could be wrong, and maybe the answers do exist, but they are not being made available to me, or to me at this time, or to any Ottawa citizen at this time.

What to do, what to do?

In this case, since a sizeable portion of the funds to build the LRT system are being sought from the federal government and the Government of Ontario, perhaps it is appropriate for those two entities (through Minister Baird and Minister Watson, respectively) to take the lead in obtaining the answers. As good fortune would have it, Mr. Baird is my MP, and Mr Watson is my MPP, so perhaps my standing as a constituent will assist in obtaining the answers to both the Western Parkway and the downtown tunnel and surface rail questions. It is anticipated that in due course a report will be prepared to document the success of this mission.

## 7. Conclusion

A seemingly widespread and deep-rooted complaint regarding the aborted N-S LRT program was the failure by mayor and council, and city staff and consultants, to provide Ottawa citizens with information, not just data, but information that was timely, comprehensive, pertinent, coherent, transparent, founded on fact, and readily understood.

Moreover, there was an associated concern that too often the mayor and councillors offered personal opinions that were not supported by evidence, and frequently amounted to little more than top-of-the-head musings or exhortations.

To assist in addressing this complaint and concern, two papers written in late 2007 were posted on the Transport 2000 Canada website. They outline how mayor and council might proceed in order to improve their credibility on the transportation file in general and the transit/LRT component in particular.

Emphasis in the two papers is on the thinking behind the doing of transportation planning, and the need to develop and apply methodological rigor throughout the transportation planning process.

Subsequent to writing the two papers, a series of questions were raised in a community newspaper article in *The News EMC*, and in a communication to Transit Committee, City of Ottawa, regarding two critical transit /LRT issues, namely, the use of the Western Parkway for an LRT line, and the tunnel versus surface rail choice in the downtown segment.

This paper combines the two papers and the two sets of questions, and introduces the idea that perhaps John Baird, federal Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, Jim Watson, provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Russell Mills, Chairman of NCC, could assist in having the requested information regarding the downtown tunnel and the Western Parkway made public.

I expect that current residents will appreciate that assistance, as will those who have questions years from now about this phase in Ottawa's transit history.

**Closing Note.** During the days since completing the text of this paper on June 14, 2009, I have encountered a number of media articles related to the matter of *Questions, Questions, and More Questions about Ottawa's LRT Plan, 2009 Edition*. Of particular pertinence, however, are media reports that due to concerns being raised at council and in the public about running trains along the Ottawa River Parkway, the planning scope has been expanded to include Carling Avenue as a potential LRT route. I hasten to add in this regard that I have not received any evidence nor have I been pointed in the direction of any evidence to support this decision, which means that, to the best of my knowledge, the questions asked in this paper remain unanswered.