

Rural Transportation Report

Introduction

The purpose of the Rural Transportation Project was to gather community feedback on the status and future outlook of transportation in Ottawa's rural regions. Rural transportation has consistently been identified as a barrier to well-being and accessing services for vulnerable rural residents. These residents include youth, seniors, modest or low-income earners, single parents, and persons with disabilities. Current transit options are minimal and new transit solutions will need to be innovative to meet the needs of the small percentage of the rural population that requires public transportation.

With the development of the City of Ottawa Transportation Master Plan, the Rural Transportation Solutions Working Group (RTSWG) and Nepean Rideau Osgoode Community Resource Centre (NROCRC) identify this as an important time to highlight feedback from rural residents on transportation solutions.

COVID

COVID changed the landscape of rural transportation in our city. A major shift included work from home (WFH) measures, which reduced residents' transportation needs throughout Ottawa. Restrictions and lockdown measures generally reduced transportation needs for residents. However, the results of our research indicate that rural transportation is still an important issue for residents. Rural transportation concerns represent a need for long-term solutions and about how communities will be connected to infrastructure and how the needs of the general population, and groups such as youth and seniors are going to be met.

Process

The Rural Transportation data gathering portion of the project ran from January 2021 to February 2022 with funding from United Way. This project was built on the work of the RTSWG, which had collected qualitative and quantitative data from rural residents in Ottawa's west end. To increase awareness of this initiative a rural contact list of all known stakeholders in Ottawa's rural area was developed. Through this list and existing collaborations, the capacity of the RTSWG was increased, gathering a committed group of citizens and members of partner organizations. The RTSWG had representation from all rural regions of Ottawa to ensure that the work represented a comprehensive picture of rural Ottawa.

The rural contact list was also used to circulate data collection tools. Two types of data collection were used in this project, surveys, and community conversations.

Surveys: Two online surveys were circulated, one from January – May and a second from October – December. The surveys were circulated through social media channels, councillor newsletters, local

papers and a local radio station. Respondents were asked to complete a series of questions about their personal relationship with and opinions on transportation in Ottawa's rural regions. In total, these surveys received 1217 responses.

Community Conversations: 14 community conversations were facilitated online from October – December. There were 25 participants in these groups and all rural regions of Ottawa were represented in the participants. Community conversations were typically composed of 3 community members and facilitators. The facilitator would ask the participants questions related to rural transportation and allow discussion. The facilitator would also record the participants' responses in writing.

Topics covered during the data collection included:

- Personal Information (Location, age, etc.)
- Current transportation behaviour
- Frequent transportation destinations
- Transit preferences (fare, destinations, frequency)
- Transit priorities
- Transit concerns
- Funding options
- Cycling (safety, importance)

Results

Below is a summary of the results from our data collection. The top findings from the data collection have been outlined below in text form. In addition, we have compiled an infographic that highlights important numbers from our research. The full results of our surveys are included in the appendices.

- Reliability and affordability are the top concerns for a rural transit solution.
- Most respondents are willing to pay a fare for transportation services that cater to their needs.
- Many residents see a rural transit solution as important, however many also prefer to drive and are not interested in transit services.
- There is a willingness to use existing transportation models (OC Transpo, Park and Rides) if they better meet respondents' needs. Residents are also interested in "on demand" options.
- 55% of respondents answered "maybe" or "yes" on whether they were willing to see an increase in taxes for services.
- Services that cater to youth and seniors are lacking and causing isolation.
- Cycling is an important issue for 58% of individuals. Safety and infrastructure (signage, paths, adequate shoulders on roads) are the biggest concerns. Cycling is mostly important for intra community travel and then recreation.
- Growth in rural communities means that these issues will only increase over time.
- West Carleton community conversation participants would like public transportation from smaller vehicles that are cheaper to run and will adequately meet demand.

Additional Data

- 24.8% of Survey 1 respondents use some form of public transportation as their primary mode of travel
- 17% of survey 1 respondents use OC Transpo – including the LRT at least once a month
- What would you consider to be a reasonable fare for a one-way trip to the nearest regular service OC Transpo bus stop?
 - \$3 = 49%
 - \$5 = 31%
 - \$10 = 5%
- 58% of survey 2 respondents say cycling is somewhat important or very important in their community.
- 55% of respondents answered “maybe” or “yes” on whether they were willing to see an increase in taxes for services.
- 69.5% and 59% of respondents said reliability and affordability were the most important issues for deciding on a rural transit solution, respectively.
- The best transit solutions for respondents’ communities are:
 - More OC Transpo service – 44%
 - A park and ride close to your home/in your village – 39%
 - On demand transit (eg. Uber or Lyft) – 37%
 - A shuttle from your community to a park and ride nearby – 33%

Recommendations

As the largest municipality in Canada, we recognize that Ottawa’s rural regions present a unique challenge for transportation. This challenge should not be the responsibility of the City of Ottawa alone, but should be confronted by a collaboration of stakeholders, including community members, service providers, non-profit organizations, and private agencies. This project itself has created stronger collaborative relationships among all of Ottawa’s rural regions, which can be utilized to inform policy solutions. With this report, we hope to show that there is a significant importance placed on rural transportation as an issue for community members. The response rate to our surveys was triple what we had anticipated, and we received passionate opinions from residents about their access to transit. The Rural Transportation Solutions Working Group and NROCRC recommend that the results from our research be considered and incorporated into rural transportation policy in Ottawa. This data is representative of Ottawa’s rural residents and can be used to build consensus towards a rural transportation solution. The RTSWG and NROCRC also offer to participate in further discussions and engagement as work continues on this issue.

For raw data from the surveys please email cscharf@nrocrc.org

APPENDIX A

Project Timeline

Jan – May

- Created and launched Survey #1
- Created a rural contact list (community associations, churches, service providers, etc.)
- Recruited community champions
- Received results from Survey #1

June - September

- Analysed results from Survey #1
- Planned community conversations
- Presented work back to RTSWG and community champions

October – December

- Community Conversations (3 per ward, 1 in French, 1 with Service Providers)
- Developed Survey #2 based on community conversations
- Launched and distributed Survey #2
- Analysed Survey #2

January – February

- Project Wrap Up
- Webinar Series Design

APPENDIX B

Slideshow Presentation of Results

Download Here: <https://rural-transportation-solutions-for-ottawa.info/>

APPENDIX C

Infographic

