Frequently Asked Questions

These are the questions submitted for our experts by participants in the third online public meeting of the "A TRAM IN MY TOWN" series

Modal shift

Won't the tram have a contrary effect? Won't having more space on the roads encourage more use of single-occupant cars?

Introducing a tram along an artery should be seen as an opportunity when it comes to urban redesign. It provides a chance to recover some space and to restore some balance between the different modes (tram, cyclists, pedestrians and cars), which helps create more transportation capacity along that road segment.

By offering high frequency and becoming more competitive than cars, in particular thanks to the regularity of the service in all seasons (rain, freezing rain and snowstorms), trams help boost the appeal of public transit for the public.

Accessibility

Will riders be able to bring their bicycle, scooter, etc. on board in order to promote the notion of intermodality?

Definitely. The tram floor and the platform would be at the same level, which would make it easy to get bicycles on the tram. In addition, there would generally be bike racks in the trams.

The tram and its infrastructures are based on the principles of universal accessibility. In addition to being an at grade mode of transportation, which facilitates access, all rolling stock has low floors, and the platforms are designed so that people with reduced mobility can access them.
Teleworking

With people teleworking, they don’t necessarily travel during peak periods. What’s the point of building a tram?

The tram, which is expected to become operational in 10 years, aims to meet the region’s needs for the next 30 to 50 years. Ridership projections are for the 2031-2051 horizon. The pandemic has certainly had a short-term impact, but the situation will not change the very long-term transportation needs. We estimate that it will take 3 to 5 years for ridership to return to pre-pandemic levels. It is important to remember that in Gatineau’s west end, the roads have been at full capacity since 2014.

Even though many people are teleworking, the roads are still congested. A tram would meet the transportation needs of the entire population, at any time of the day, and not only those of peak period commuters. With frequencies of every 3 to 5 minutes during peak periods and 6 to 10 minutes at other times, a tram would provide an efficient alternative to single-occupant cars. Every shift from private car to public transit will generate not only individual but also collective benefits.

Economy and society

How can introducing a tram help reduce households’ transportation costs and the collective costs associated with cars?

For every $1 paid by an individual taking their car, society pays the equivalent of $5.77 in social costs, compared to $1.21 for every $1 an individual pays taking public transit. That’s an almost 5 times higher cost to society.

For households, transportation is the second largest budget item after housing. By minimizing their use of cars, they can reduce their individual transportation costs. The cost of car ownership is often not well estimated because it is limited to car payments and gas, and overlooks the cost of licences, maintenance, tire changes, insurance, etc.

In order to really reduce transportation costs, households need to be able to forgo the second or third car. In order to do that, they need alternatives. Those alternatives include public transit, which is fundamental, and a tram, which helps reduce the number of vehicles per household and thereby significantly reduce their transportation costs.
**How can a tram help revive a region’s economy?**

Reducing the need to own several cars helps frees up some of the household budget, which people would then be free to invest in other sectors (e.g. in local services and businesses). A tram would also help connect residents in Gatineau’s west end and Ottawa to the commercial centres in less time and more conveniently (i.e. more frequent service), thereby making them more accessible.

A tram would also enhance the city’s appeal not only for families, students, businesses and companies, but also for tourists, which would lead to significantly more real estate investment in Gatineau.

**Service**

**How do you see the overall bus service alongside the tram? How will it be integrated with the dedicated transportation system?**

As with the current Rapibus, there would be a local bus service from neighbourhoods to the tram stations.

The tram could run at the following frequencies and times:

- Peak periods: 6 minutes on each branch, and 3 minutes on the common trunk;
- Other times: 10 minutes on each branch, and 5 minutes on the common trunk; and
- From 5 a.m. to 1 a.m. (20 hours a day), and possibly longer.

The new bus system and service will be fine-tuned in the subsequent pre-project phases, and a public consultation will be held as part of the process.

**You mention services, but I don’t see the Gatineau and Hull hospitals connected to the new tram. Why is that?**

Given that the Gatineau hospital is located in the Gatineau sector, it is served by local routes, which in turn connect to the Rapibus.

As for the Hull hospital, the details of the service will be fine-tuned in the subsequent pre-project phases.
How long will trips take during peak periods?

Compared to taking the car, which is subject to weather and road conditions, the tram, because it runs on a dedicated platform (like the Rapibus), would be more regular. As a result, regardless of the time of day, trip durations would be more consistent.

The exact trip durations will be determined during the subsequent pre-project phases, along with the number and locations of stations. At this point, travel times are estimated as follows:

- 36 minutes between Aylmer and Ottawa; and
- 32 minutes between Plateau and Ottawa.

Parking

Will there be park-and-rides near the stations?

Yes, the complementary study foresees that the Rivermead park-and-ride would remain, parking would be added at the Allumettières park-and-ride, and a new park-and-ride would be added at the corner of chemin Vanier and boulevard du Plateau.

The increased frequency of service at the start of the circuit would reduce the need for people to board mid-way, which would help reduce the pressure on the Rivermead park-and-ride. Of course, these will all be reviewed in greater detail during the subsequent pre-project phases.

What will happen to street parking along the tram’s circuit?

When a dedicated public transit system is introduced, there is a tendency to redesign and reallocate spaces for active transportation such as walking and biking. The tram would promote modal transfer and reduce the need for families to own several vehicles. As a result, there would be less need for parking on nearby streets.

In order to properly meet the needs of future users of the dedicated public transit system, it is important to set an order of priority for access to the different stations: access for active modes, good local bus service, appropriate street parking by-laws and park-and-rides.

It is also expected that a policy on street parking would be introduced for areas near the stations to limit any nuisance resulting from increased parking on side streets. In some cases, Gatineau may have to ban street parking for safety reasons.
In order to discourage the use of single-occupant cars, maybe we could already start regulating parking?

Ville de Gatineau recently adopted a policy on friendly streets. This policy aims to turn certain streets into suitable public places that shape living environments. Those streets are said to be friendly because they:

- focus on the human scale;
- are managed to ensure their safe use by everyone; and
- are designed to minimize the impact on the environment.

A number of factors were taken into consideration in determining the new street models:

- type of environment;
- population density;
- street function;
- presence of public transit; and
- parking spaces other than on-street.

To that end, Gatineau revised the manner of integrating parking with the street, both for streets yet to be built and for existing streets slated for rehabilitation.

The new policy on friendly streets will be available in early 2022 at gatineau.ca.

Stations

Where exactly will the stations be located?

As a rule, when installing a tram system, stations are set at 600 to 700 metre intervals. Stations located too close to one another mean frequent stops, which makes for longer travel times, which is inconsistent with a “dedicated” mode. Stations located too far apart would make them less accessible for some riders. The idea is to find the right balance in order to make travel times attractive, while positioning the stations at reasonable distances.

The exact locations of the stations will be determined in the subsequent pre-project phases, and will be discussed in consultations with residents.

What will the choice of future station locations be based on?

A number of criteria are taken into account when choosing station locations, in particular the availability of space, suitability in relation to the surroundings, interaction with other modes of transportation, accessibility, ridership projections, nearby population size, and real estate development and project projections.
Consultations

When do you expect to hold consultation meetings to discuss the issues affecting the public? We are talking about consultations leading up to the BAPE.

The project office is well aware that a project of this scope has to be planned and designed in collaboration with a number of stakeholders, including residents, associations and institutions, and we are making every effort to keep in touch with all of them.

The team will be hiring engineers to design the preliminary pre-project and to prepare the environmental impact study. That study includes a public consultation leading up to the BAPE hearings.

Once the owner’s engineers join the project in the spring or summer of 2022, the project office will be able to start preparing for the first sector-specific consultations for the fall of 2022 or the winter of 2023. Those consultations will give residents in the affected sectors the opportunity to express their concerns and issues and to propose adequate attenuation measures. Afterwards, the engineers will proceed with the designs and get back to residents in the spring of 2023 to present the pertinent and technically feasible mitigation measures.

What impact can we expect for a neighbourhood that the tram will go through, such as Val Tétreau, e.g.: new constructions, parking spaces, new businesses, etc.?

These elements will be discussed with the neighbourhood association and the residents of the concerned sector during the consultations planned for the fall of 2022 or the winter of 2023.

Fares

Will it cost the same to take the tram as it costs to take the bus?

The fare strategies for the dedicated public transit system will be studied in subsequent pre-project phases.

What would you say to free public transit?

STO already has a social fare. You’ll find the details here. In terms of being free for everyone, without revenue from its riders, STO would need to get funding elsewhere. Governments and municipalities already subsidize public transit. They would have to invest even more if STO were to offer free fares to everyone.
Choice of mode

Is a tram suitable for our climate?

Studies indicate that the choice of an electric tram is compatible with Gatineau’s climate. Trams are already used in Scandinavian cities, western Canada and northern US states. Closer to home, trams are also used in Toronto and Waterloo, which have similar climates.

Trams have integrated systems that scrape the cable as they pass to prevent the accumulation of freezing rain, as well as automated wheel blasting systems. In addition, given that trams run on rails, they won’t slip when the ground is covered by freezing rain.

What is the difference between a tram and light rail transit (LRT)?

A tram can easily be inserted into an urban environment along existing roads. Also, it is better adapted to our needs because it allows for more frequent stops given that stations are on average located 700 metres apart. Finally, its capacity is better suited to the projected ridership.

Light rail transit (LRT) is often recommended for peripheries far from the downtown. It uses an entirely dedicated platform, and stations are farther apart to optimize the speed of movement and thereby make travel times more attractive. They require specific infrastructures (tunnels, bridges, etc.) to avoid any contact with roads.

Why not build a Rapibus in the west end?

As with any dedicated project, we rely on forecasts to determine the most appropriate mode depending on the vehicle’s capacity. Studies prepared for the west end indicate that a bus rapid transit (BRT) system would not be able to meet the public transit needs in the west end, which will increase by 33% over the next 30 years or to reduce traffic on the roads (2051 being the horizon used for the study). Given that a tram’s capacity is at least 3 times more than that of the Rapibus, it will be able to meet the transportation needs in the west end.

Furthermore, there is strong support for reducing the number of buses in the downtowns. Another Rapibus would result in more bus traffic.

Why not build more reserved lanes instead of a tram?

The total number of buses needed to accommodate the projected increase in ridership would saturate the reserved lanes, even with articulated or bi-articulated buses. In addition, adding buses to meet the increased demand in future years would only aggravate the situation and further clog the roads. In that regard, the “reference” and “all-bus” scenarios involving only buses were deemed non-viable because they would be unable to meet future demand.
What happens if a tram collides with a car?

Given that STO is responsible for maintaining the public transit service at all times, a contingency plan would be developed before the tram service becomes operational in the event that anything should disrupt the tram, such as a collision with a car. This plan would identify the measures to be applied to maintain the service at such times, and may include the activation of buses.

At what speed will the tram run?

The tram would run at between 20 and 25 km/h, which is consistent with other such systems in North America and Europe.

This will be fine-tuned in subsequent pre-project phases, based on the following factors:

- the number of stations and the distance between them; and
- the slow-down zones (turns, road crossings)

Choice of circuit

Why does the circuit leave boulevard Alexandre Taché at UQO and Val-Tétreau? (to turn onto Lucerne)

Intuitively, we would expect the tram to pass on boulevard Alexandre-Taché. But in-depth studies yielded different results.

From the point of view of accessibility, the population pools served are quite similar, almost identical, whether we use boulevard Alexandre-Taché or boulevard Lucerne, which is slightly to the south.

The advantage of boulevard Lucerne is that it would require no partial or total land acquisition. Because boulevard Alexandre-Taché is very narrow, inserting the dedicated system on this artery would require the demolition of some 20 commercial or residential buildings. Thus, this option would have a rather significant impact on the built environment. All things being equal in terms of system performance, using boulevard Lucerne would avoid the demolition of several buildings. In addition, the results of the public consultation conducted in 2019 indicate that passing the tram behind UQO got 53% of the votes, far more than the Alexandre-Taché option (24%).

Boulevard Alexandre-Taché would also be freed of its reserved lane, which would no longer be required. Thus, this space could be put to other uses, and would provide the opportunity to improve the urban layout (i.e. wider sidewalks, more street parking for businesses, greenery, etc.). Given that Gatineau’s land use plan only provides for one traffic lane in each direction on this artery, that would mean a lot of changes, and would finally allow for the long-awaited changes to boulevard Alexandre-Taché.
Would the option chosen for the Ottawa portion depend on the amount of federal funding and/or decisions by the City of Ottawa?

The comparative analysis of the different scenarios under study concluded that the optimal dedicated public transit solution for connecting Gatineau’s west end and the Gatineau and Ottawa downtowns is the all-tram scenario, with a tunnel under Sparks Street in downtown Ottawa. This is the scenario that best meets the needs identified and detailed in the complementary study.

On the Ottawa side, in the event that the tunnel option proves not to be feasible (due to costs, technical issues or impact on existing infrastructure and buildings), the optimal solution would be the all-tram scenario with at grade insertion along Wellington Street in downtown Ottawa. Both options will be set out in further detail in subsequent pre-project phases.

On August 13, 2021, the NCC announced its recommendation to the federal government for at grade insertion along Wellington Street in Ottawa.

Why not have the tram circuit follow the former railway right of way along boulevard Lucerne? Why use chemin Vanier? Boulevard Lucerne seems like a more logical option given that it is not as busy and has more room to expand/build a dedicated lane.

The complementary study identified several circuits and variants before coming up with a short list of scenarios. The objective was to find viable and effective solutions that would meet the growing needs in Gatineau’s west end. If the axis in question does not appear in the preferred option, that is to say the All Tram (T1) scenario, it is because it does not meet one or more of the objectives or because there were specific issues. In the case of boulevard Lucerne, at the west end of the circuit, chemin Aylmer best meets the needs by serving the greater number of users when projected growth to the north and south of the circuit is taken into account. In the case of rue Vanier, boulevard St-Raymond best meets the needs along the north-south axis.

Insertion into the urban setting

Would the tram have right of way at intersections?

Yes, a tram’s arrival triggers a traffic light change at intersections. Installations would be set up at all intersections with traffic lights to ensure safe passage for the tram, cyclists and pedestrians. In most cases, the tram would go through the intersection moving straight forward at the same time as cars.

More detailed studies will be conducted in later stages of the pre-project phase.
**Would the tram and cars use the same lane?**

No, trams have a dedicated lane. Cars do not share that space. Having cars and trams share the same lane would lead to congestion near stations (cars stopped behind trams), and the risk of improper driving (passing on the other tram lane). The only place where trams and cars would cross paths is at intersections, where there would be measures to ensure that trams have the right of way and that cars can cross safely.

A dedicated lane improves the frequency and punctuality of the tram, and greater punctuality means greater reliability and performance.

**Where will the trains turn around on the Ottawa side?**

Unlike buses, trams have two driver’s cabs, one at either end of the vehicle, and lateral doors on either side, which makes it possible to reverse course. This calls for specific equipment before or behind the last station to enable the tram to change lanes.

Their positioning will be studied and defined in subsequent pre-project phases.

**Implementation**

**Why are we looking at 10 years to implementation?**

An infrastructure project of this scope involves several stages (opportunity study, preliminary engineering, confirmation of funding, government approvals, detailed engineering, construction, testing). The standard timeline for completing all of these stages is 10 years.

**Until the tram becomes operational, could you consider initiatives such as car pooling for two people instead of three per car to qualify for the use of reserved lanes, and giving 100% electric cars use of those lanes? Or again, free parking for 100% electric cars, and banning small trucks from downtown?**

Even though electric cars are better for the environment, they take up just as much room as gas-powered cars, and will therefore continue to clog roads that have already been at capacity in the city’s west end since 2014. Similarly, reducing the number of occupants from 3 to 2 per vehicle in reserved lanes would only increase the number of cars in that corridor, which would severely impede the bus service.
What will the environmental impact of this project be during the construction? What measures will be implemented during that time to mitigate the nuisance caused by noise, dust and detours?

Every construction project has its share of inconveniences. An environmental impact study will be conducted to find ways to minimize these and implement a series of mitigation measures to be implemented while the work is underway. Those measures would help reduce the impact and ensure that environmental issues are resolved so that their impact on the territory is minimized.

How wide will the right of way be during and after the construction work, for example through green spaces between Val Tétreau and Terrasses de la Chaudière?

Those details will be worked out during the upcoming pre-project phases.

What will the call for tenders process look like? Will bidders be subject to some type of assessment?

Before proceeding with a call for tenders for this project, there will be a request for qualifications, and all of the applications received will be assessed based on a detailed grid of pre-determined assessment criteria. Only those companies that meet the minimum requirements will be invited to bid for the project.

The request for qualifications process will provide the opportunity to determine the qualifications and experience of the bidders, including their past performance with similar projects.

Funding

Will the developers building in Gatineau’s west end be required to contribute to the construction and operation of the tram as a proportion of the surface area they construct?

In the next project planning phases, different innovative funding mechanisms will be assessed to determine whether they can be used to cover the project costs.
What about the project involving a loop linking Ottawa and Gatineau between the two bridges (Alexandra and Portage)?

The purpose of the complementary study was to propose a mode and a circuit that would meet the transportation needs of residents in the west end travelling to the Gatineau and Ottawa downtowns. The interprovincial loop project endorsed by the federal government could complement the tram project, given that it essentially focuses on off-peak period travel. Thus, there is no contradiction or opposition between the two projects. However, it should be noted that the loop does not fall under the responsibility of the Gatineau-Ottawa tram project office.