Frequently Asked Questions

These are all of the questions for our experts from participants in the second online public meeting of the serie "A TRAM IN MY TOWN"

### Changing habits

**How do you encourage people who are reluctant to change to adopt a new mode (change in their daily habits as a result of the appearance of the tram in their neighbourhood, changing to an active or collective mode, etc.)?**

Any change in habit takes time. By offering residents efficient alternative means of public transportation that compete with single occupant cars, we help promote good travel habits. The sooner these alternatives are adopted by customers, particularly the new generation, the better the chances that they will keep using public transportation (and active transportation) for a very long time.

Thus, it is essential to provide quality service and infrastructures. Offering efficient, frequent and reliable service will naturally attract people.

### Bike paths and bicycles

**Will we be able to take our bicycles on the tram?**

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

The tram and its infrastructures are built on the principles of universal accessibility. All rolling stock has low floors, and the platforms are designed so that people with reduced mobility can access them.
How can you make bicycles more attractive given our weather (snow, cold and freezing rain)?

Bicycles are used through the winter in many northern cities. Take the example of Montréal. The bike paths are improved every year, as is the réseau blanc (a bike path that is maintained every winter). The asphalt is fully cleared so you get good traction with your bicycle in the cold. However, given our weather, as with our cars, we have to think about changing our tires on our bicycles.

Will there be any physical separation (bollards, cement borders) between the bike path and vehicles?

There will be a two (2) metre lane in each direction for a 1.5 metre bike path. This leaves a .50 metre buffer zone between the bike path and the road, which will allow, if necessary, for a physical separation. Bollards (or a border) will not necessarily be required all along the route.

There will be more detailed analyses during the subsequent pre-project phases to identify those places where a physical separation will be needed to ensure users’ safety. Safety measures will be introduced depending to the section/sector and different criteria, namely the speed of adjacent traffic, visibility, the expected number of people, and the surroundings (schools, parks or businesses).

Will we be able to cross the tram track safely by bike?

Measures will be introduced at every intersection with traffic lights to enable cyclists and pedestrians to cross safely. These measures will be designed to ensure that the tram, pedestrians and cyclists can cohabit, and will be detailed in the subsequent pre-project phases.

Will the Sentier des Voyageurs bike path and its park be affected by the proposed route?

The proposed route will not affect the Sentier des Voyageurs because the latter runs much closer to the river. It winds along the river, and the dedicated system is limited to the existing rail corridor.

There will be a safe link between the tram bike lane and the Sentier des Voyageurs bike path.

I have a rather expensive bicycle. Will it be safe to leave it at the station?

Yes, because there will be secure bike racks. Their numbers and locations will be determined over the subsequent pre-project phases (planning phase).

How will the Gatineau bike path be connected to the public transit system?

The intention is to connect, wherever possible, the bike lane running along the tram to the other bike paths (existing or planned), including the Sentier des Voyageurs, the Sentier du Ruisseau de
la Brasserie, Wilfrid-Lavigne and the bike path running along Boulevard des Allumettières, Boul. du Plateau/Gamelin/Parc de la Gatineau, etc.

**Will the Rapibus bike path be extended to connect with the tram bike lane?**

Yes, the intention is to extend the Rapibus bike lane so that it can eventually connect to the tram bike lane.

**Will cyclists be taken into consideration in the planning, in designing the trams and the stations?**

There will be a number of public consultations during the project planning phase (which will run until 2025). These will address the needs of cyclists and universal accessibility, among others. A project of this scope has to be planned and executed in collaboration with a number of stakeholders, including residents, associations and institutions.

**Park-and-rides**

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

Yes, the complementary study anticipates additional parking spots at the Allumettières park-and-ride, as well as the one at the corner of chemin Vanier and boulevard du Plateau. The Rivermead park-and-ride may remain as is. The increased frequency of service at the start of the circuit will reduce the need for people to board mid-way, which will 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.

**Choice of mode**

**Why not go with a fleet of electric buses instead of a tram?**

Starting in 2025, STO will be purchasing 100% electric vehicles, with a plan to fully electrify its bus fleet by 2041. Although it may be environmentally beneficial, this option will not help meet the public’s increasing transportation needs. The roads have already been at full capacity since 2014, and adding the required number of buses will only tie up traffic further.

Due to the maximum capacity of this mode of transportation, the only viable means to meet long-term transportation needs is the tram, because it can move at least twice as many users as articulated buses. The advantage of a dedicated mode lies in its ability to move more riders, which helps reduce the number of STO buses in the Gatineau and Ottawa downtowns.
Have the alternative modes been considered: light rail, metro and elevated train?

Every public transit mode has been reviewed as part of this project, including alternative modes such as the high-capacity multi-articulated trambus, autonomous intelligent vehicle, light rail, SkyTrain, metro, etc. However, Gatineau’s population (285,000 inhabitants) does not justify vehicles of such capacity. The type of mode is based on the projected number of riders. According to the medium- and long-term projections, the capacities of light rail and metro exceed the number of expected riders. The costs associated with these modes would be too high in relation to the needs.

Choice of circuit

What will the tram’s circuit be?

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

On the Ottawa side, if the tunnel option should not prove to be feasible (due to costs or technical issues), the optimal solution would be the all-tram scenario, with an at grade insertion on Wellington Street in downtown Ottawa. These two options will be set out in greater detail in the subsequent pre-project phases.

On the Quebec side, the complementary study identifies the following circuits as being optimal:

- North axis: chemin Vanier, and boulevards du Plateau and St-Raymond;
- South axis: boulevards des Allumettières and Wilfrid-Lavigne, and chemin d’Aylmer; and
- These two axes will share a common portion, boulevards Alexandre-Taché and Lucerne (between UQO and the Ottawa River) as well as rue Laurier, crossing the Portage Bridge to Ottawa.
- For the insertion in downtown Gatineau, the complementary study found that it would not be viable to maintain vehicle traffic on rue Laurier. The two no-vehicle options (partial or total) between Eddy and Laval or between the Chaudière and Portage bridges will be assessed in subsequent pre-project phases.

Consult the map of the circuit.

Do you anticipate any residential and/or commercial expropriations?

Yes, acquisitions are expected in certain places along the circuit to secure the required space to integrate all of the components of the dedicated system (tram, roads, sidewalks, bike lanes and stations). This information will be set out in greater detail in subsequent pre-project phases, and will be communicated to the concerned residents.
Why not avoid chemin d’Aylmer? The circuit could continue along boulevard des Allumettières given the densification westward along boulevard des Allumettières.

Because of the way the territory is configured, the complementary study concluded that two axes would be needed on the Quebec side to properly serve the entire population:

- North axis: chemin Vanier, and boulevards du Plateau and St-Raymond;
- South axis: boulevards Allumettières and Wilfrid-Lavigne, and chemin d’Aylmer; and
- These two axes will share a common portion, boulevards Alexandre-Taché and Lucerne (between UQO and the Ottawa River) as well as rue Laurier, crossing the Portage Bridge to Ottawa.

Consult the [map of the circuit](#).

Was the option of using the Chief William Commanda Bridge to connect to the O-Train via the Bayview station considered, and if so, why was it not chosen?

The Chief William Commanda Bridge is too far west of the Gatineau and Ottawa downtowns, which are part of riders’ main destinations. As well, the O-Train would not have sufficient capacity to handle all of the Gatineau public transit riders heading to Ottawa.

Why did you opt for an insertion on boulevard Lucerne instead of boulevard Alexandre-Taché given the distance for the connection with the Rapibus? And what about the number of potential customers? Is the circuit behind UQO final?

Intuitively, one can picture a tram on boulevard Alexandre-Taché. But the detailed studies led to different findings.

From the accessibility point of view, we would be serving a very similar, if not equal, population pool whether the circuit runs along boulevard Alexandre-Taché or slightly further south on boulevard Lucerne.

At the same time, the advantage of boulevard Lucerne is that no partial or total acquisition would be required. Boulevard Alexandre-Taché is very narrow, so inserting the dedicated system along this artery would require the demolition of some 20 commercial and residential buildings, as well as some exhumations at the St-James Cemetery. We would be looking at a rather significant impact on the built environment. Given that the performance in terms of access to the system would be the same, running the circuit along boulevard Lucerne would avoid any demolition.

What’s more, the results of the 2019 public consultation indicated that the axes behind UQO were supported by 53% of the respondents, far more than the 24% in favour of the Alexandre-Taché axis.

Boulevard Alexandre-Taché would also find itself freed up from its reserved lane, which would no longer be required. Thus, that space could be used for other things, and could be used to
improve the urban layout (i.e. wider sidewalks, street parking for businesses, landscaping, etc.). Given that Gatineau’s land use plan only provides for one traffic lane in each direction along this artery, that leaves a lot of room to work with. That means a terrific opportunity for the long-awaited redesign of boulevard Alexandre-Taché.

**Land use**

Is there a risk of urban sprawl with these public transit developments?

On the contrary! As soon as a tram project is announced, it sends out the signal for redevelopment and urban densification. The longer we wait, the greater the risk of urban sprawl.

Given that much of Gatineau has already been built, is it not too late to talk about structuring the territory?

There is still a lot of potential in Gatineau, even along the proposed circuit, for urban development and redevelopment, which will help further structure the city. We can still densify our neighbourhoods by focusing a big part of Gatineau’s growth around the dedicated axes, such as the Rapibus and the tram, in order to improve land use in those sectors.

Residential and commercial zoning are important factors when it comes to using cars in Gatineau. Shops, daycares and schools are often several kilometres away from homes. Is Gatineau prepared to review its zoning to allow for more self-sustained neighbourhoods, where people can get around on foot, that would support this approach to public transportation?

In 2021, Ville de Gatineau completed the review of its official plan to bring it in line with its land use and development plan (Schéma d’aménagement et de développement). The outcome was increased densification and mixed use to create more self-sustained and ecoresponsible living environments, maximize the use of public transportation and promote active transportation in the following sectors: the downtown, Vieux-Aylmer, the Buckingham urban core, and along the Rapibus corridor in the Gatineau sector.

In Gatineau’s west end, the official plan and zoning by-laws were amended to allow for increased densification and more mixed use along the tram’s circuit. Finally, the intention is to adjust the official plan and zoning by-laws to have them reflect the wish to create more self-sustained and ecoresponsible living environments around the future stations.
Will this project involve building sidewalks on either side of chemin d’Aylmer?

The project foresees a lane for the tram, a sidewalk and a bike lane in each direction. This will be confirmed in subsequent pre-project phases (planning phase).

How can we avoid gentrification and ensure that we retain affordable housing near the stations?

This issue has been under study for some time. STO cannot, on its own, avoid gentrification or ensure the retention (or increase) of affordable housing near the stations. This is the city of Gatineau’s responsibility. Municipal by-laws are the means of making the necessary changes to achieve such objectives. This is one of the reasons why it is so important for STO and the Project Office to work closely with the city of Gatineau and its partners, and to demonstrate the need for integrated mobility planning and land use.

The Master Plan provides for the adoption of a strategy of inclusion of affordable housing in private-sector residential projects. This strategy is still under development, and is part of the work of Gatineau’s Commission sur le développement du territoire, l’habitation et l’environnement.

In terms of the recommended circuit for the tram, we understand that boulevard Alexandre-Taché would be reduced to 2 lanes. Will buses still run along this artery?

Boulevard Alexandre-Taché would no longer have its reserved lane, which will no longer be required once the tram is in place. Thus, that space could be used for other things, and could be used to improve the urban layout (i.e. wider sidewalks, street parking for businesses, landscaping, etc.). Given that Gatineau’s land use plan only provides for one traffic lane in each direction along this artery, that leaves a lot of room to work with.

Why not change the building standards to ensure fewer parking spots for new residences? For instance, some of the units would not have parking, which would encourage occupants to adopt more environmentally-friendly lifestyles.

In 2021, Ville de Gatineau completed the review of its official plan to bring it in line with its land use and development plan (Schéma d’aménagement et de développement).

The provisions pertaining to the number of authorized parking spots and their location were strengthened for areas within the following sectors: the downtown, Vieux-Aylmer, the Buckingham urban core, and along the Rapibus corridor in the Gatineau sector.

In Gatineau’s west end, the parking provisions were strengthened along the tram’s projected circuit. The intention is to adjust the official plan and the zoning by-law, for instance by including parking provisions.
We had an underutilized railway line in Gatineau for decades, but we kept it to build the Rapibus. Nonetheless, it is still underutilized, and could eventually be used. What plans are there for that railway line?

Indeed, in addition to Gatineau’s west end, the tram could someday serve Gatineau’s east end. The buses currently running along the Rapibus corridor would then be replaced by rail transportation. This transition would not be in the foreseeable future, but is something to keep in mind for the longer term.

Have you considered ground-level power supply for the tram to avoid using aerial catenary wires and avoid cluttering the landscape?

Ground-level power is a very costly option, and this type of supply is not recommended in northern climates because of the use of de-icing salt and abrasives on our roads in the winter. Although the tram will be powered through aerial catenary wires on the Quebec side, there are currently several models with a more limited visual impact. The tram will run the 2 km segment between the Portage Bridge and Elgin Street in Ottawa on batteries in order to protect the heritage aspect of that sector (in the event that the at grade insertion option on Wellington is chosen). The supply for this segment will be reviewed in the subsequent pre-project phases that will be underway until 2025.

However, relying on batteries all along the circuit is not a viable option, particularly given the associated costs and the autonomy available with the current technology.

Stations

Where do you propose placing the following stations: Val Tétreau, UQO, and the one for the connection with the Rapibus?

The exact locations of the stations will be determined in the subsequent pre-project phases.

You have mentioned that a 600 to 700 metre distance between stations would be the standard. Is that the best solution?

As a rule, when installing a tram system, stations are set at 600 to 700 metre intervals. However, the distance between stations can be more for a heavier system such as the REM, the Montréal metro or the O-Train. 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.
**Pandemic**

Why build a tram when so many workers are teleworking and ridership has fallen significantly due to the pandemic?

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. 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. Telework will affect some of that traffic, but will remain marginal compared to the pre-pandemic situation. COVID-19 will have delayed the projections by no more than a few years. This is why all public transit project are going ahead, and none have been cancelled (RTC, REM, etc.).

**Weather conditions**

Will the Gatineau-Ottawa tram project include regular snow and ice clearing along the bike lane?

This will all be reviewed during the subsequent pre-project phases (planning phase).

To often we see examples and photos of European and American cities with much milder winters than ours. What have you learned about adapting to our Canadian winter?

The analyses indicate that the choice of an electric tram is compatible with the northern climate, including Gatineau’s. Trams are already running in Scandinavian cities, western Canada and the northern United States. Closer to home, we also have trams running in Toronto and Waterloo, which are weatherwise comparable.

**Service**

There is little mention of integrating the tram into downtown Gatineau. How will the tram connect to the Rapibus and to the main federal complexes in Gatineau (e.g. Terrasses de la Chaudière, Place du Portage)?

For the Rapibus, the connection will be behind UQO, close to the synthetic soccer/football field. That is where the Rapibus and the dedicated system will connect. On the Ottawa side, the Lyon station has been identified as the optimal place to transfer to the O-Train. Riders will be able to transfer to get to Ottawa’s east and west ends from that station.

At the level of rue Montcalm, the tram will move onto rue Laurier, until the Portage Bridge. The roadway between Montcalm and Eddy will be completely reconfigured and diverted closer to Terrasses de la Chaudière to maintain access to the Chaudière Bridge and the dedicated system.
How frequently will the tram run?

The tram could run with the following frequencies:

- Peak periods: 6 minutes on each axis, 3 minutes on the common portion;
- Other periods: 10 minutes on each axis, 5 minutes on the common portion;
- Service from 5 a.m. to 1 a.m. (running 20 hours a day), but this could be extended.

**Implementation**

Do we know what the contractual options of the tendering process will be (traditional mode, design-built contract, etc.)?

A preliminary analysis of the possible tram modes is underway. Notwithstanding the preceding, the findings of these additional analyses over the next few years will be used to determine the optimal solution for the project.

**Construction and maintenance**

Given the labour shortage in the region, who will look after repairs and maintenance on the trams and the system?

The tram is currently expected to become operational in 10 years. Between now and then, the operator will have enough time to get organized, hire qualified labour, and arrange for training and development procedures for the necessary skills.

In terms of determining who the operator will be, this aspect will be addressed in the subsequent pre-project phases.

**Fares**

Will there be coordination with Presto in Ottawa to enable riders to use their card to transfer in Gatineau?

Based on what the current arrangement is between Transcollines and OC Transpo in terms of the interoperability of fare payments, it is very likely that the same principle will be applied to the tram. This aspect will be specified during the project execution phase.

What will the tram fare be?

It is still too soon to identify the cost of using the service. That will all be addressed in the subsequent pre-project phases (planning phase).
Costs and financing

Where do you stand in terms of financing?

At this point, the government of Quebec has confirmed its support for the project. Discussions with the federal government are still underway, as it has yet to confirm its financial contribution, although it has on several occasions stated that it supports this project. STO is continuing to work on obtaining 100% funding for eligible costs from other levels of government.

What will Gatineau’s annual cost of supporting and maintaining the tram be once it’s built?

This type of project is generally financed. In this case, most of the funds will come from subsidies from the Government of Quebec, the federal government (through subsidy programs administered by the Government of Quebec) and the city of Gatineau. It is still unknown what the specific impact will be on municipal taxes, but this will be addressed in the subsequent pre-project phases (planning phase).

Would you consider offering free transit or a reduced fare to those living with physical and motor disabilities who rely on public transit to get around.

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.