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DATE: 6 March 2000

TO/DEST: Co-ordinator, Transit Services Committee

FROM/EXP. General Manager

SUBJECT/OBJET: **TRANSIT PRIORITY IN CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS**

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### **DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Transit Services Committee receive this report for information.**

### **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting of 24 November 1999, the Transit Services Committee requested a report from staff on how the arrangements for transit priorities are decided and enforced in the course of construction and reconstruction projects and how they can be improved. This report responds to that request.

Between 600 and 800 construction projects are circulated through the Service Planning Department each year. The majority of these are reasonably small scale projects of short duration that have little or no impact on public transit operations. Between 10 and 20 are significant projects that have a direct effect on transit service for an extended period of time.

Service Planning Department staff thoroughly review all of the extensive construction projects and discuss the scope of work with the project manager. The extent of the work, time lines and expected road impacts are determined in advance. Most of the projects are in Ottawa-Carleton and for these OC Transpo staff work very closely with staff of the Region's Environment and Transportation Department to develop construction phasing and traffic management plans that are consistent with the Region's policies for priorities on roadways (i.e. walking, cycling, transit and autos). For projects in Hull, OC Transpo staff align with STO staff in the planning of the detour, or other arrangements, and make every effort to ensure that transit is afforded appropriate priority.

Once developed, the plan is discussed internally at OC Transpo to ensure that those responsible for Transportation Operations, Scheduling and Communications have a full understanding of what is proposed and can provide input.

Service is sometimes detoured away from the construction area. When this happens, we work with the project manager to ensure that land owners on the detour route and customers are aware of the situation. Appropriate alternative stop arrangements are organized. After the start of the project there is an ongoing need for monitoring and enforcement.

When transit service remains on roads that are under construction, ongoing discussions are held with the project manager and project supervisor to ensure that bus stop facilities are maintained and that customers can safely access them. Regular progress meetings are held to keep up-to-date with construction status and to address any issues that may arise. OC Transpo Transit Supervisors are encouraged to attend and provide valued feedback and suggestions. Understanding of the needs of the construction project and of the transit service is gained to ensure that work can proceed with as little impact to transit service as possible.

In all cases, Service Planning Department staff are in regular contact with project staff and Transportation Operations. This includes the overall project manager as well as the full-time on-site supervisory staff.

## DISCUSSION

Last year there were several major construction projects which had an impact on transit. The relocation of the Fleet Street Trunk Sewer, which could have disrupted transit service badly at the west end of the central area, was carried out with very little impact on transit. This was managed by detouring Transitway service onto Commissioner and Old Wellington Street thereby insulating it from the effects of the construction.

The major roadworks on Wellington, Confederation Square and Elgin Street were a challenge for all traffic operations. The plan was phased over several years but was tightly constrained in 1999 because of the desire to have as little core area road works in 2000 as possible. In principle, the plan maintained transit priority throughout the project. It was recognized that, no matter how well the plan worked, additional time would be required for transit to traverse the construction area, and this was included in the schedules.

Overall, this extensive construction project was carried out relatively successfully but there are some lessons that can be learned from the experience. One is in the area of enforcement. We were faced with problems at pinch points where transit priority was not observed by many auto drivers. For example, for one stage of the plan Slater Street east of Metcalfe Street was designated for transit use only, but auto violations were high and led to significant delays for our customers. It took an unacceptable length of time during which OC Transpo security staff provided a presence to try to deter violators, to secure additional police officers for the task.

Another key area that will be improved is in the realtime communications with the Mobility Services Division Traffic Control Centre at Loretta Ave. On the days when traffic was most congested, the Traffic Control Centre was not made aware of the extent of the problem until the next day.

The other area in which greater efforts could be made is in communicating the “Take the Bus” message. At times, due to pressing preoccupations with juggling many complex elements, this was not communicated as clearly and consistently as it should have been.

Communications and coordination for the three different construction projects in Hull were far more problematic. On several occasions we were surprised by sudden changes in plan and found transit service adversely affected. For this project, we worked closely with our counterparts at STO, who were equally distressed by sudden changes from the agreed plan. We believe that, following strong protests in December from the General Managers of both OC Transpo and STO, these projects are now on track for successful completion by the summer of 2000.

### IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE FUTURE

We have discussed these lessons with our colleagues in the Environment and Transportation Department, with whom we have a strong, cooperative relationship. The idea of assuming from the start that heavy enforcement will be required to maintain transit priority, and explicitly building it into the traffic management plan, will be pursued. In this way, rather than a lag in up-grading the level of enforcement following monitoring, it will be possible to ease off on enforcement in cases where the level provided is not warranted by actual experience. The Environment and Transportation Department has agreed that the construction budget for major projects will contain a specific item for increased levels of enforcement. As the Police do not have sufficient resources to support our needs during major construction projects, all of the extra enforcement required is done by off-duty officers with the cost to be borne by the project.

During any future major construction works that have transit implications, our inspectors on the scene will be in direct contact with the Mobility Services Divisions Traffic Control Centre so that immediate realtime signal timing changes can be implemented to enhance transit priority.

We are also working with our colleagues to reinforce the “Take the Bus” message in all communications associated with major reconstruction projects in areas where transit is a good alternative.

For projects in Hull, we will continue to work with our colleagues in STO to achieve the same sort of coordination and cooperation that we receive in Ottawa-Carleton, and will apply our experience to improvement in a proactive manner.

Overall, where there is to be major construction and disruption to traffic in a busy area, even with transit priorities in place, there will always be some effect on OC Transpo operations. It is our challenge to continue to collaborate closely with the project managers to minimize delays, and to ensure that customers are informed clearly of any changes which affect them.

Finally, although this report has discussed major construction and reconstruction projects, there is an ongoing need to improve the processes and communications around short-term disruptions on major

transit routes. These can be caused by any number of things, such as utility repairs, the breakdown of vehicles in bus lanes etc.

Transportation Operations staff are working with Mobility Services Division staff and Regional Police Services to find ways to speed up reactions, and hence minimize the disruption caused.

The traffic cameras now installed by the Mobility Services Division across the region now offer a powerful tool to improve the effectiveness of monitoring programs. Currently there are 26 cameras monitoring dozens of intersections, feeding displays to the Traffic Control Centre at the Loretta Ave. facility and shortly it will be possible to view them through the Internet. Later this year, they will also be fed directly to OC Transpo's control centre. There are several in key positions around the Central Area Transitway, on Albert Street, Slater Street and on Mackenzie King Bridge. These will assist in monitoring major construction projects and also in the early identification of short-term problems so that they can be dealt with effectively.

*Approved by  
Gordon Diamond*