

Executive Summary

Public transit is an important asset for urban dwellers. However, the provision of public transit is more complicated in regions with multiple jurisdictions and geographical considerations. Therefore, transit integration – including access to routes, fares, and clear information before and during a journey – must be deliberately planned for to yield the best user experience for customers. Transit integration in the context of Ottawa-Gatineau is particularly important for research as it is a uniquely bilingual and interprovincial metropolis.

This report aims to:

1. Describe the interprovincial transit user experience in Ottawa-Gatineau.
2. Provide policy recommendations to relevant governments and the transit agencies in both Ottawa and Gatineau (OC Transpo and the Société de transport de l'Outaouais/STO, respectively) with the goal of improving user experience.

This report addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of integration in interprovincial transit in Ottawa-Gatineau, and how does it affect the user experience?
2. Is it convenient to take transit between important cross-border destinations?
3. How can the two transit agencies (along with relevant governments) improve the experience of interprovincial transit users in Ottawa-Gatineau?

Methodology

This report assesses the current state of transit integration through online and field research (representing pre-trip and mid-trip information, respectively). Fare information, route information, and bilingualism on websites were the focus of online research. The same elements of transit integration were assessed in the field on STO and OC Transpo buses, on the Confederation Line of the OC Transpo O-Train LRT, and at six stations/major transfer points. Field data were collected using observational methods (photos and handwritten notes).

Each station/major transfer point where field research was conducted was chosen due to its importance as a commercial, employment, and/or institutional hub. Tunney's Pasture Station, located about three kilometres west of Ottawa's downtown, is the western terminus of the O-Train Confederation Line and a campus for thousands of Government of Canada employees. Rideau Centre is a large shopping centre in Downtown Ottawa. Lyon Station is a transfer point between STO and OC Transpo located in the western part of downtown Ottawa. Portage-Terrasses is a major employment hub situated across the Ottawa River in the Hull Sector of Gatineau. Les Promenades Rapibus Station is located about 200 m north of Promenades Gatineau, a large mall with over 150 stores in the Gatineau Sector (Les Promenades, n.d.). Aylmer is a sector of Gatineau west of downtown Hull.

Literature Review

Very little research exists at the nexus of the three main subjects of this report: the transit user experience, transferring, and operations. Existing articles are often siloed into specific topics, quantitative in nature, and/or researched without the lens of transit integration. The goal of this report is to examine operations from the outside perspective of a transferring transit user, through qualitative methods, and with a focus on transit integration. However, some articles are important precedents for this research.

Analysis and Results

Online Research

Fares are mostly accepted across transit systems, including the Presto and Multi smart cards from OC Transpo and STO (respectively). However, some gaps are evident, including a mismatch in transfer times, fare price differences, and other restrictions. Information about fare integration is found on both the OC Transpo and STO websites but with different levels of detail and required clicking. Route options differ greatly between OC Transpo and STO. While only one out of over 130 OC Transpo routes provides all-day, two-way service to Gatineau (and five others only operating during peak hours), 64% of the many STO routes terminate in

Ottawa. The OC Transpo website is translated with extreme accuracy and without technical issues. The STO website is also well-translated for English speakers (especially regarding critical routing and service information), but some minor translations of figures and maps are missing.

Field Research

Stations and Major Transfer Points

Bilingualism is strong at all OC Transpo stations. Signage is also plentiful, with maps at different scales being located throughout stations. However, each station had noticeable gaps, ranging from infrequent signs to gaps in wayfinding to missing information about STO service. STO stations/major transfer points severely lack in English-language information and general wayfinding signage.

Buses and LRT

The entire end-to-end experience on OC Transpo is bilingual. Everything from announcements to wayfinding signs are listed in English and French. OC Transpo buses have overhead LED displays that show pertinent information. Furthermore, fare details are shown on buses, and buses and LRT trains have route or system maps onboard. Contrarily, STO buses are missing several elements, like bilingual signs (including advertisements) and route information on overhead LED displays or maps.

Transfer Point Fieldwork Checklists

Transfer Point Fieldwork Checklists were created for each of the three origin-destination pairs: Portage-Terrasses and Tunney's Pasture, Promenades Gatineau and Rideau, and Aylmer and Lyon. These checklists serve to summarize the transfer experience and ease of connection during a hypothetical trip between two areas. These checklists also help identify gaps and strengths concerning the user experience.

Strategies and Recommendations

The online and field research guided the creation of strategies and recommendations. Targeted strategies are limited to specific stations or routes. System-wide strategies involve larger elements like fare structures. Below is the list of strategies and recommendations:

Targeted Strategy #1: Improve signage and wayfinding measures to guide users through their user experience

- Recommendation #1: Add bilingual signs in OC Transpo stations that indicate nearby STO service
- Recommendation #2: Add bilingual wayfinding posts outside near stations, and maintain existing wayfinding measures
- Recommendation #3: Add local area/neighbourhood maps with bus stops in and near STO Rapibus stations and major hubs in Gatineau
- Recommendation #4: Show “via X” on OC Transpo bus head signs to help travellers understand routes
- Recommendation #5: Add a dedicated Portage-Terrasses inset to the STO system map
- Recommendation #6: Add appropriate service maps at important hubs

Targeted Strategy #2: Expand cross-border service into currently underserved communities

- Recommendation #1: Add an all-day OC Transpo short-run bus from Downtown Ottawa to Hull
- Recommendation #2: Introduce all-day service to Gatineau on OC Transpo Route #15
- Recommendation #3: Increase the service span for express OC routes from suburban Ottawa to Gatineau
- Recommendation #4: Examine the feasibility of a peak-time bus route from Orléans to Gatineau
- Recommendation #5: Expand STO service to more Ottawa neighbourhoods and destinations
- Recommendation #6: Introduce all-day OC Transpo service between Ottawa and the Gatineau and Aylmer sectors

System-Wide Strategy #1: Better reflect the bilingual nature of the National Capital Region

- Recommendation #1: Include English on STO signs on buses, at stops, and in stations
- Recommendation #2: Show the full intersection name on the on-bus LED display, and announce all STO bus stop intersections in English

System-Wide Strategy #2: Make the fare payment process more seamless

- Recommendation #1: Allow riders to use Presto to begin their journey on STO
- Recommendation #2: Allow riders to use their Multi Card to begin their journey on OC Transpo
- Recommendation #3: Extend OC Transpo transfers to match the 2-hour STO transfer window
- Recommendation #4: Allow Ontario residents to purchase a Multi Card

System-Wide Strategy #3: Encourage and facilitate transit service integration across Ottawa-Gatineau

- Recommendation #1: Encourage cross-agency collaboration on the design of designated major transfer points
- Recommendation #2: Implement a National Capital Transit Pass