Office of the Auditor General City of Ottawa

Audit of Bus Service Planning and Scheduling - Highlights



Why we did this audit

Bus service planning and scheduling are critical processes that determine how OC Transpo delivers bus transit to residents. Effective planning and scheduling processes are needed to ensure decisions are objective, based on analysis, are aligned with strategic priorities and meet the needs of the public. Given the ongoing challenges with bus reliability and public concern over transit, the approach to plan and schedule the bus service, including the bus route redesign (New Ways to Bus), was critical for us to examine.

What we found

The audit found that scheduled run times (i.e. the time it takes to complete individual bus trips) were last comprehensively updated as part of the planning for New Ways to Bus, using data collected in 2023. However, delays in launching New Ways to Bus in 2025 resulted in run times becoming inaccurate, impacting on-time performance.

In addition, the audit found OC Transpo has not consistently met its peak weekday service requirements due to insufficient buses and operators. These challenges have impacted OC Transpo's ability to deliver consistent and reliable bus service at target levels. Further, we found that key areas of the current bus fleet plan could be more formalized and communicated to Transit Committee.

We identified that service standards and policies that guide transit service planning are outdated and, at times, unrealistic. In addition, OC Transpo does not have clearly defined service-planning priorities to guide service standard development. This is necessary to ensure decisions are consistently made to support the established priorities, given funding constraints. The audit also noted gaps in monitoring and reporting performance against service standards, as well as the outcomes of New Ways to Bus.

The audit found that service planning decisions are not all driven by technical, priority-based analysis. Further, there is no public-facing mechanism to holistically evaluate, and transparently report, major service changes.

We made ten recommendations to ensure that:

- A methodology has been established to risk rank, monitor and update run times to support the reliable delivery of the bus schedule.
- Recovery and deadhead travel times are reviewed and updated.
- A more conservative approach to bus and operator resources is used in planning and scheduling bus service.
- Key risks and assumptions used in bus fleet planning are reviewed and communicated to Transit Committee.
- Transit service objectives are prioritized, service standards are updated and consolidated, and routes that no longer are aligned are adjusted.
- A system-wide process to monitor performance against all service standards is established.
- Service changes (e.g. route additions) are evaluated based on a consistent set of criteria to demonstrate value for money.

For more details on this report please visit our website.
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