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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



[Photo courtesy OC Transpo]

AT A GLANCE

For young people in Ottawa, transportation is more than getting from one place to another. The transportation journey shapes how they spend their time, money, and energy and what opportunities they can access. Drawing on youth experiences from two co-creation sessions (a design-thinking technique that surfaces ideas from shared collective experiences), this report examines the everyday decisions young people make when navigating Ottawa's transportation system and identifies opportunities to design around their lived experiences.

TWO KEY TAKEAWAYS

01 Competing Trade-offs

Young people are often forced to choose between reliability, affordability, safety, accessibility, and time rather than having a transportation option that adequately meets all of these needs.

02 The Whole Journey

Transportation works as a connected journey, meaning that barriers anywhere along the route, from getting to a stop to responding when something goes wrong, can shape the entire experience.



INTRODUCTION



ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATIONS

CMC is a membership club and third space where socially conscious and civically engaged individuals and organizations come together to put people, ideas, and action around the same table. COJA is a youth-focused and youth-led organization committed to creating opportunities for young people to participate in their communities while building career and life skills.

Facilitators From the June 5th Co-Creation Session

WHAT'S IN THE REPORT

Youth Experiences



On May 29 and June 5, 2026, the Change Makers Club of Canada (CMC) and Club Opti-Jeunesse des Jeunes Adultes (COJA) invited young people to share their lived experiences with Ottawa's transportation system and work alongside people with professional and community experience in transportation.

Youth Stories



The following report presents the findings from these two sessions. It combines participant experiences and ideas into sections informed by design-thinking methods to help policymakers, transportation practitioners, advocates, and community organizations better understand how young people experience transportation in Ottawa.

The report should be understood as a synthesis of the stories expressed during the sessions rather than as a representative survey of all Ottawa youth.

WHAT WE HEARD



BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SESSIONS

Participants described transportation as much more than a means of getting from one location to another. Transportation affects whether young people can attend school and work, participate in social and community activities, manage their time, maintain their independence, and feel safe while travelling. Small disruptions, such as a delayed bus, an unreliable connection, poor winter maintenance, or an unsafe intersection, can have consequences that extend well beyond the immediate trip.

MAJOR NOTES

01. Trade-offs and modes

Young people frequently make trade-offs between reliability, affordability, accessibility, convenience, and safety; these trade-offs shape choices and limit opportunities.

02. Participation and design

Young people in Ottawa envision a city where getting around is safe, reliable, accessible, affordable, and gives them the freedom to participate fully in their education, work, communities, and everyday lives.

WHAT WE HEARD

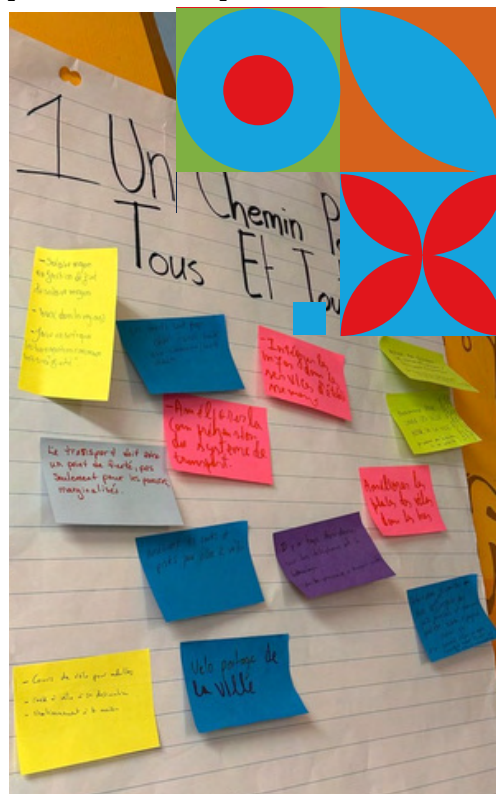
03. DEPENDABLE TRANSIT THAT SAVES TIME

When transit is delayed or unreliable, participants may leave significantly earlier, miss school or work, pay for an expensive alternative such as rideshare, or choose another mode of transportation altogether.

04. TRIPS THAT WORK FOR EVERYONE

For young people with accessibility needs, these challenges can become even more pronounced because barriers encountered along the journey, not simply on the vehicle itself, can determine whether a trip is possible.

[Session Photo]



05. SAFER STREETS, BETTER BIKE AND WALK ROUTES

Cycling can provide greater control over travel time and cost but can introduce concerns about road safety and infrastructure. Walking can become difficult when distances are long or sidewalks and pathways are poorly maintained.

06. YOUTH VOICE IN PLANNING DECISIONS

Youth do not simply want transportation services to be improved on their behalf; they want meaningful opportunities to communicate their experiences, contribute ideas, and understand how their feedback influences decisions. This points to an important distinction between consultation and co-creation. Young people want to see clearer connections between participating in a consultation and seeing their perspectives reflected in transportation planning and policy.



THE CHALLENGE

OTTAWA YOUTH EXPERIENCE

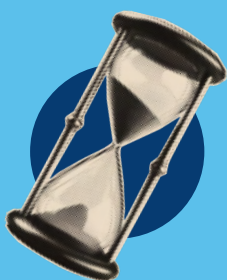
Ottawa youth experience transportation differently from other age groups. For many young people, transportation services are not simply a service they use; it is a condition that determines what they can realistically do with their time, money, and independence. Getting to school, work, an appointment, or an evening activity often requires making decisions before the journey even begins, and then making new decisions when something goes wrong. The challenge is that these decisions often come with a cost. When transit is unreliable, a young person must leave earlier, pay for another mode, or risk being late. When cycling feels unsafe, they can take a longer route or decide not to make the trip. When evening transportation is limited, they may leave an activity early or decide not to attend at all.

This creates a central challenge for transportation in Ottawa: **how do we design a system that gives young people meaningful choices, rather than forcing them to choose which cost they are willing to bear?**



INTERCONNECTED CHALLENGES

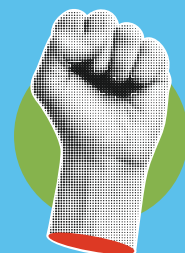
These challenges are interconnected rather than isolated. Improving one aspect of transportation without considering the others can simply shift the burden from one area to another.



Lost time



Less money



Limited independence



BACKGROUND

OTTAWA'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Investing in public transportation is an investment in people. As Ottawa continues to grow, the city is making significant investments in the infrastructure and services that shape how people move around the city. Transportation planning in Ottawa encompasses much more than buses and trains. It includes roads, cycling infrastructure, pedestrian infrastructure, transit priority measures, and the connections between them. For young people in particular, these different parts of the transportation system are experienced as one continuous journey: getting to a stop or station, waiting for a service, travelling, transferring between modes, reaching a destination, and figuring out what to do when something goes wrong.



Ottawa's current transportation planning framework is rooted in a series of city-wide plans approved in 2013. On November 26, 2013, Ottawa City Council unanimously approved the Transportation Master Plan, Official Plan, Infrastructure Master Plan, Ottawa Cycling Plan, and Ottawa Pedestrian Plan. Together, these plans established a vision for the city's growth to 2031 and provided a framework for transportation and infrastructure investments across the city.

Since then, the city has continued to update and expand its transportation infrastructure. Ottawa maintains an extensive road network while also continuing to invest in active transportation.

BACKGROUND

In April 2023, City Council approved an updated Transportation Master Plan Active Transportation Project list intended to address critical missing links in the city's pedestrian and cycling networks. The projects include new and upgraded sidewalks, multi-use pathways, bike lanes, cycle tracks, street crossings, and other connections.

More recently, the city's Transportation Master Plan Capital Infrastructure Plan was approved in July 2025. The plan identifies investments in transit, roads, and active transportation intended to support Ottawa's growth and advance the city's transportation objectives.

In March 2026, City Council also advanced bus priority measures on Bank Street, including a pilot of peak-hour bus-only lanes and four permanent segments of 24-hour bus-only lanes. The city is also proceeding with targeted cycling and pedestrian improvements along the corridor and exploring improvements to parallel north-south cycling routes.



These investments demonstrate that Ottawa's transportation system is not static. The city is actively changing how people move around the city and where transportation resources are directed. For young people, however, the impact of these investments ultimately depends on how those changes are experienced in everyday life.



BACKGROUND

PUBLIC TRANSIT AND YOUNG PEOPLE

OC Transpo is the primary public transportation provider in Ottawa, operating a large bus network supported by the city's O-Train system. For many young people, public transit is an important part of accessing school, employment, social activities, and community life, particularly for those who do not have access to a vehicle. Research on youth transportation similarly shows that transportation access can shape young people's ability to participate in educational and extracurricular activities [1].



Affordability is one part of that experience. In January 2025, OC Transpo implemented changes to its youth fare structure alongside a broader five percent increase in the base transit fare included in the City's 2025 budget. Calls from organizations prompted the City to introduce a new youth fare policy in 2026 under which youth aged 11 to 18 can ride OC and Para Transpo for free on weekdays after 5 p.m., weekends, and holidays. Students with school-issued transit passes can also ride for free, while children aged 10 and under continue to ride free at all times.

Reliability has also been a significant part of the recent transit experience. In April 2025, OC Transpo introduced New Ways to Bus, described as the largest bus service change in the city's history. The changes were intended in part to improve service reliability, alongside the Bus Maintenance Action Plan and continued recruitment efforts.

BACKGROUND

Despite these efforts, service delivery has continued to fluctuate. According to OC Transpo's Key Performance Indicators, conventional bus service delivery fell below the city's 99.5 percent target during the winter of 2025–26, reaching its lowest point in January 2026. O-Train Line 1 also experienced significant service disruption in early 2026, with service delivery reaching its lowest level in March. These disruptions were attributed to issues involving the cartridge bearing assemblies on Line 1's Alstom Citadis Spirit vehicles.

For a young person, these numbers translate into decisions made at the individual level. A delayed bus can mean leaving home earlier, arriving late to school or work, missing an activity, or paying for another way to travel.

A service disruption can change not only a single trip but the rest of the day around it. Reliability is therefore experienced not simply as a technical measure of service delivery but as the predictability of a young person's ability to participate in everyday life.



BEYOND THE BUS AND TRAIN

Public transit is only one part of the transportation system. Young people who walk or cycle depend on the infrastructure that connects their homes, schools, workplaces, transit stops, and destinations. The quality and maintenance of sidewalks, pathways, cycling routes, crossings, and intersections can determine whether an otherwise short trip feels practical or safe.



BACKGROUND

Research on adolescent active transportation similarly identifies distance, perceived safety, infrastructure, and street connectivity as important factors shaping whether young people walk or cycle. Recent research also identifies safety concerns as one of the most frequently reported barriers to cycling among children and adolescents [2].

At the same time, the experiences of young people cannot be separated neatly into categories such as “transit,” “cycling,” or “walking.” A young person may walk to a bus stop, take the bus to an O-Train station, transfer to the train, and walk or cycle the rest of the way. A disruption in any one part of that journey can affect the entire trip.



This is particularly important for young people with accessibility needs, for whom the condition of sidewalks, pathways, snow and ice, and connections to transit can determine whether a service is practically accessible at all.

This interconnectedness also means that improvements in one mode can create new choices without necessarily eliminating the underlying challenge. A person may choose to cycle because it is faster or less expensive than transit, but that choice depends on whether the route feels safe. A person may choose transit because it is more affordable than driving, but that choice depends on whether the service is reliable enough to meet the demands of school, work, and social life.

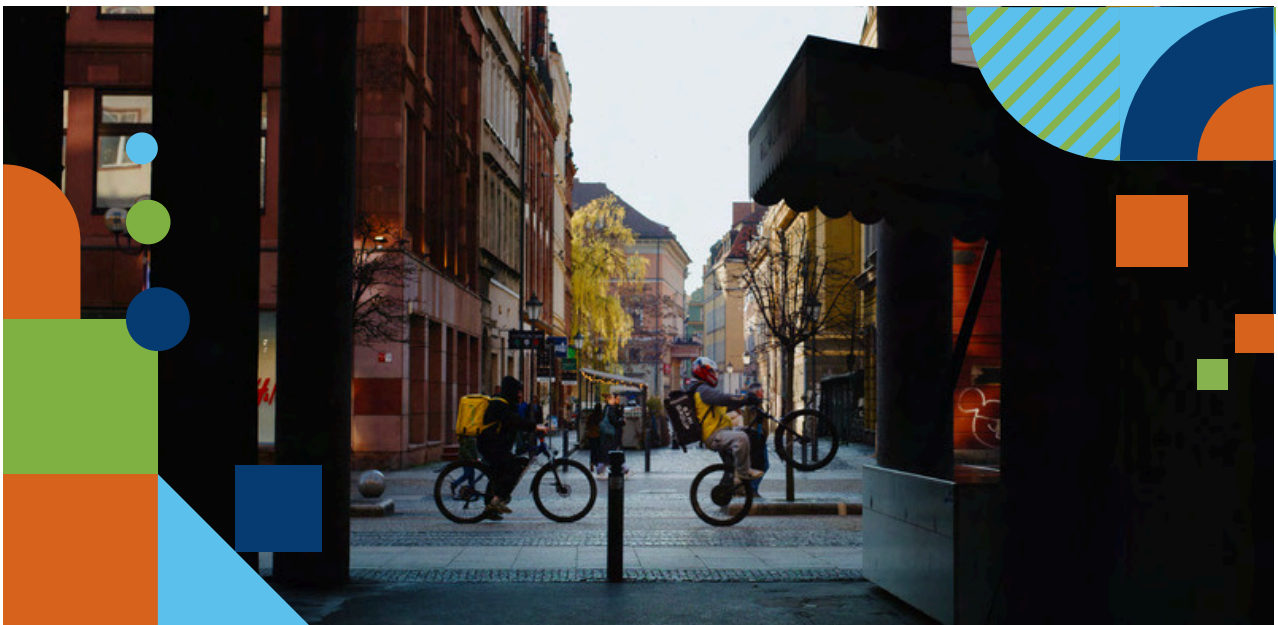
BACKGROUND

LEARNING FROM OTHER CITIES

Ottawa is not alone in trying to address these challenges, and other Canadian communities have taken different approaches to affordability, reliability, safety, and accessibility. Several municipalities have introduced programs specifically aimed at reducing transportation barriers for young people. Cold Lake, Alberta, offers free bus service six days a week to select locations.

Kingston operates a High School Transit Pass Program that provides eligible students with free transit in Grades 9–12 alongside training intended to help students use the transit system safely and confidently. Winnipeg's Free Youth Transit Pass Pilot provides free transit to students aged 11–21 who are enrolled in Grades 7–12 for the 2026–27 school year.

Other cities have focused on reliability and safety. Vancouver has introduced bus network improvements that include extending bus lanes and bus-lane operating times on various routes.



Edmonton has publicly reported route-level reliability, making it possible to compare how consistently individual routes operate on schedule. Calgary uses transit peace officers to patrol transit spaces, respond to safety concerns, enforce bylaws, and coordinate with emergency services. Their work also includes connections with outreach teams and community organizations supporting people experiencing broader social challenges.



BACKGROUND

These examples do not provide a single model for Ottawa to adopt. Rather, they demonstrate that municipalities are approaching transportation challenges through a range of interventions, from fare policy and youth-specific programs to transit priority, service monitoring, and safety initiatives. They also provide useful context for considering the choices available to Ottawa as it continues to invest in its transportation system.

LOOKING AHEAD

Young people continue to navigate the practical consequences of transportation decisions every day. Their experiences take place within a transportation system that is changing over time, shaped by new investments, policies, infrastructure, and services.



Understanding how those changes are experienced on the ground is an important part of understanding whether transportation is meeting the needs of the people who rely on it.

The remainder of this report provides a snapshot of how transportation is experienced by the young people who participated in the sessions at this point in time. These perspectives provide an important view into how young people experience transportation in their everyday lives, but they should not be understood as a comprehensive assessment of Ottawa's transportation system or as a direct assessment of the City's current plans and investments.

The report is intended to provide a basis for thinking about how transportation can continue to evolve in ways that respond to the realities of young people's everyday lives.





METHODOLOGY

OTTAWA YOUTH EXPERIENCE

This project employed a design-thinking approach alongside qualitative methods to explore youth perspectives on transportation in Ottawa. Data were generated through small-group discussions in which participants responded to a series of predetermined prompts concerning their experiences, needs, challenges, and ideas for improving transportation. Participants engaged with these prompts through conversation and recorded their ideas, observations, and proposed solutions in writing. The small-group format was intended to allow participants the space to draw on their own experiences while also responding to and building upon the perspectives of others.

The groups included a mix of Ottawa youth, transportation practitioners, and transportation advocates. The project consisted of two sessions: one conducted in English and one conducted in French. Across the two sessions, there were 38 participants, including 25 youth. Bringing together youth with practitioners and advocates allowed the sessions to incorporate lived experiences with perspectives informed by professional and advocate experience with transportation services.

The session prompts were presented to participants as open-ended questions. However, the questions were developed from design principles that CMC and COJA identified as potentially relevant to understanding transportation experiences and generating ideas for improvement.

[Session Photo]



The selection and relevance of these principles were determined through discussions between CMC and COJA prior to the sessions. The prompts were therefore intended to provide structured entry points for discussion without prescribing particular responses or solutions. Participants were encouraged to use the prompts to identify challenges, describe their experiences, articulate needs, and propose potential solutions for Ottawa's transportation system.

Following the sessions, the qualitative data underwent a data-cleaning and preparation process. Audio recordings were transcribed, transcripts were reviewed and cleaned for readability and accuracy, and identifying information was removed or de-identified where appropriate.



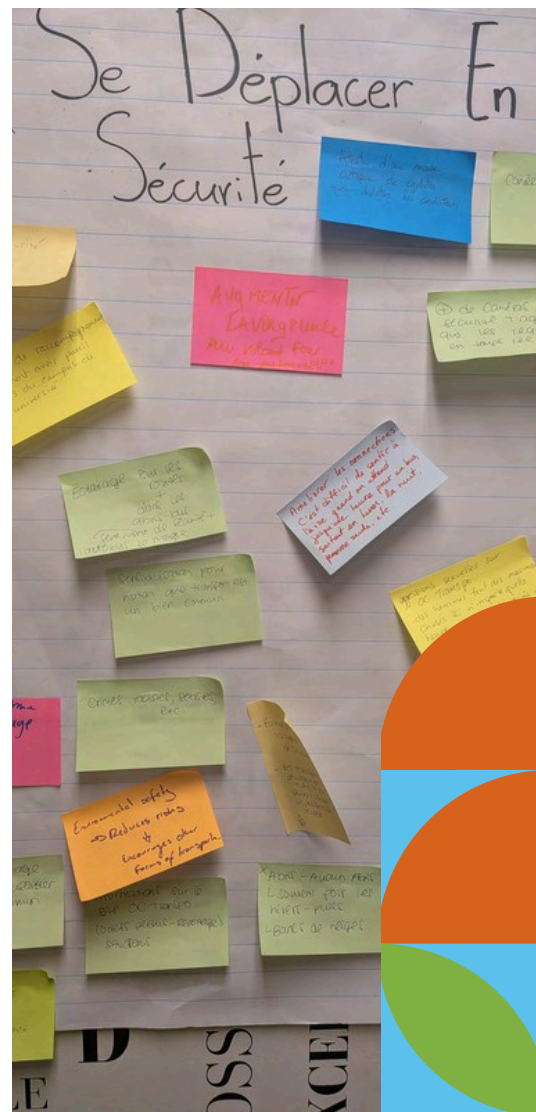
METHODOLOGY

Written responses recorded on sticky notes during the sessions were transcribed into a digital format and organized according to the relevant workshop or discussion station. Original transcripts and written materials were retained to allow the cleaned and digitized data to be checked against the source material.

AI-assisted tools were used during the data-cleaning and preliminary coding stages to support the organization and processing of the qualitative material. AI was used as an assistive tool rather than as a substitute for researcher judgment. Outputs generated through AI-assisted cleaning and coding were reviewed manually, with researchers correcting errors, assessing the appropriateness of suggested coding, and retaining responsibility for decisions about the interpretation of participant responses. The use of AI, including the tools used, prompts, purposes, and subsequent human review, was documented as part of the research process.

Analysis proceeded inductively using grounded analytical techniques. Rather than beginning with a fixed set of findings, the research team examined the cleaned transcripts and written responses to identify recurring experiences, needs, challenges, ideas, and relationships across the data. These observations were progressively synthesized into broader themes and insights concerning Ottawa transportation.

[Session Photo]



The analysis then translated these findings into a set of design principles intended to capture the conditions and considerations that should inform transportation design and decision-making from the perspectives represented in the sessions.

The findings were further synthesized into personas and journey maps to illustrate how different transportation experiences and needs are encountered across the course of everyday journeys.



METHODOLOGY

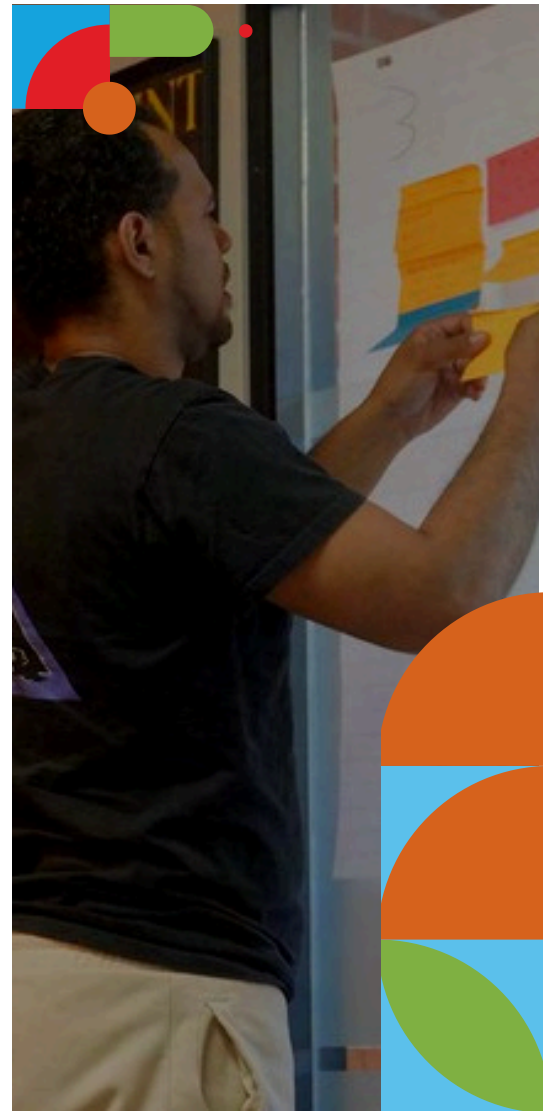
The personas were developed from patterns identified in the qualitative data rather than from individual participants, and were used as analytical and communication tools to represent distinct experiences within the broader dataset. The journey map similarly synthesized recurring experiences and pain points across different stages of a transportation journey. Together, these outputs were intended to translate qualitative participant data into accessible tools for understanding transportation experiences and identifying opportunities for policy, planning, and community action.

Limitations

This report is not intended to be an academic research study or to establish causal relationships, and the findings should therefore be used accordingly.

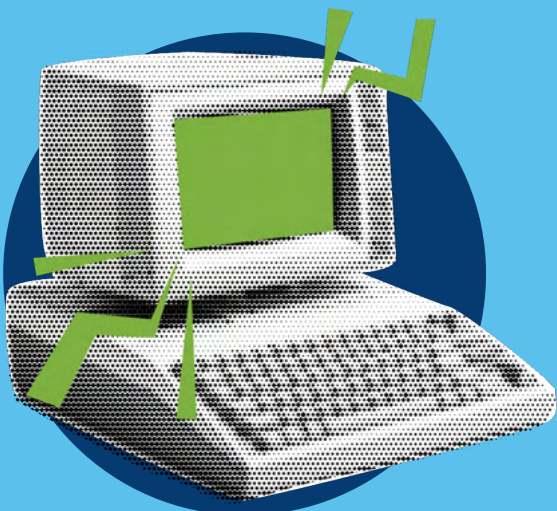
Additionally, although Société de transport de l'Outaouais (STO), another important transit provider in the National Capital Region, was invited to participate in the co-creation sessions, it is not discussed in the report because STO did not emerge as a substantive part of the participant data or the transportation experiences discussed during the sessions.

[Session Photo]



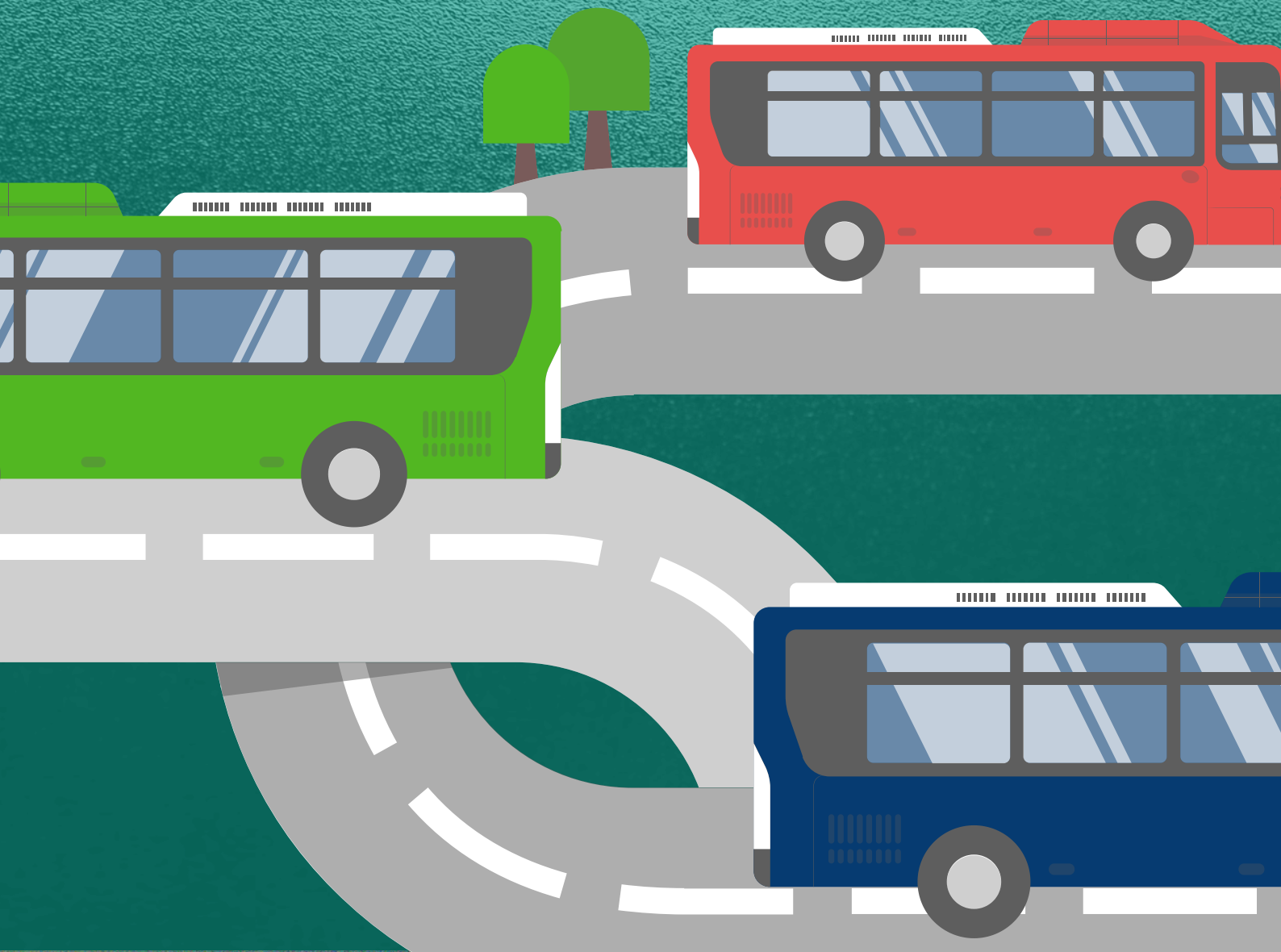
CLEAN + ETHICAL USE OF AI

All information has been reviewed
by humans to ensure data
integrity



KEY FINDINGS

"A PATH FOR EVERYONE MEANS ENSURING THAT EVERYONE, REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY LIVE OR THEIR INCOME LEVEL, CAN GET AROUND AS THEY WISH, WHENEVER THEY WISH, AND SAFELY." -PARTICIPANT AT OUR CO-CREATION SESSION HELD JUNE 5TH.





TIME IS MONEY

OTTAWA'S TRANSIT SYSTEM CREATES A DISPROPORTIONATE TEMPORAL AND FINANCIAL BARRIER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Several participants shared that they often spend more time in transit than they do in class. They described late buses, cancelled trips, and missed transfers as making it difficult to get to school, work, and other commitments on time. Many said unreliable service costs them both time and money, resulting in missed classes, lost opportunities, less time with family, and fewer opportunities to participate in their communities.



Participants felt that suburban youth have fewer accessible and reliable transportation options. Suburban youth felt a disproportionate time burden and felt unable to attend many events downtown or in other suburbs, leading to a sense of exclusion and isolation.

Participants described public transit as becoming increasingly expensive and questioned whether fare increases were being matched by noticeable improvements in service or rider amenities. Many felt they were paying more while continuing to experience delays, unreliable service, and limited improvements to the overall transit experience, such as the availability of heated bus shelters.

Trim Station on June 6, 2025. (Josh Marano/CTV News Ottawa)

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT BEYOND CONSULTATION



[Session Photo]

OTTAWA MUST ACTIVATE YOUTH LEADERS IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

Participants emphasized that meaningful engagement does not end when feedback is collected. They described the importance of seeing how their ideas are acknowledged and reflected in future decisions. Many shared that when young people can see the impact of their contributions, they are more likely to remain engaged, participate in future consultations, and encourage their peers to become involved. Participants also recognized that youth leaders and trusted community voices can play an important role in helping others feel confident that their participation matters.

Participants thought that young people are not intentionally excluded from public consultation; rather, they are never meaningfully reached. Participants suggested that trusted community organizations, schools/universities, and grassroots networks play an important role in raising awareness about city public consultations on public transportation, active transportation, and infrastructure projects. Participants described that a youth-led environment makes participation feel more approachable and comfortable for sharing their experiences and ideas.



BUILDING TRUST IN TRANSPORTATION



YOUTH WANT SAFE AND WELCOMING TRANSPORTATION

Participants viewed trust as something that is built through everyday experiences. Clear and timely communication during service disruptions helps reduce uncertainty and strengthens confidence in the public transportation system. Participants emphasized that understanding what is happening—and when service is expected to resume—helps them make informed decisions and feel more in control of their journey.

Cold, Dark Nights and Transit

Participants mentioned that transit services are reduced during extreme cold and late-night hours, when it is most dangerous to wait outdoors. This places an additional burden on those who depend on public transportation; longer waits outdoors were described as particularly challenging for youth shift workers, youth with disabilities, and youth who have limited transportation alternatives.

Winter Maintenance and Equity

Participants viewed winter maintenance as an equity issue. They described how the differences in the maintenance of roads, sidewalks, cycling infrastructure, and transit stops can create unequal transportation experiences for people who rely on walking and cycling, in addition to public transit. Examples provided by participants include snow clearing along sidewalks and trails being a lower priority compared to roads, poorly maintained and uneven sidewalks, and a numerous amount of sidewalks and trails that end randomly. These examples are hazards that make youth feel unsafe and make active transportation a difficult option to choose. Hazards and feelings of danger are amplified for youth with physical disabilities.



BUILDING TRUST IN TRANSPORTATION



YOUTH WANT SAFE AND WELCOMING TRANSPORTATION

Participants recognized that many of the situations affecting their sense of safety on public transit reflect broader social challenges rather than problems created by the transit system itself. Encounters with individuals experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, or substance use were described as contributing to feelings of unease, while also highlighting the need for compassionate, community-based responses beyond transportation alone.

Safety, Transit, and Gender

For many participants, especially young women who participated in the co-creation session, building trust and feeling safe was closely connected to feeling comfortable and confident while using public transit. Participants described how poorly lit waiting areas, extended waits, and unpredictable interactions with others created a sense of unease, particularly when travelling alone or later in the day. This changed the way young women presently navigate different modes of public transportation; many of them expressed that they avoided transit after dark, sat closer to the bus driver, shared their location with family/friends, and waited at nearby businesses, all to ensure their safety.

Celebrating Diversity through Public Transit

Participants advocated for diversity to be openly celebrated. Some described feeling there is an opportunity to celebrate holidays and other culturally relevant events outside of Anglo-Saxon or Christian traditions. Displaying celebratory messages for Ramadan as well as Christmas was seen to be more inclusive. Celebrating diversity makes more young people feel like they belong.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

AND PARTICIPANT-GENERATED IDEAS

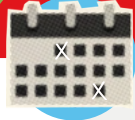
DESIGN PRINCIPLES ARE GUIDING STATEMENTS THAT TRANSLATE USERS' NEEDS, VALUES, AND EXPERIENCES INTO CRITERIA FOR DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING SOLUTIONS. THE PRINCIPLES BELOW WERE DERIVED DIRECTLY FROM THE CO-CREATION SESSIONS AND REFLECT IDEAS GENERATED THROUGH GROUP CONVERSATIONS AND CAPTURED ON PARTICIPANT STICKY NOTES. THEY SHOULD BE USED TO GENERATE, TEST, AND REFINE SOLUTIONS THAT RESPOND TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVED EXPERIENCES. USE THEM TO DESIGN APPROACHES THAT EXPLICITLY ADDRESS SAFETY, AFFORDABILITY, PREDICTABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND FAIRNESS. BY CENTRING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES, OTTAWA TRANSIT PLANNERS AND POLITICAL LEADERS CAN MOVE BEYOND GENERIC INFRASTRUCTURE TO BUILD ACCOUNTABLE, SUSTAINABLE, AND EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS.



A PATH FOR EVERYONE

OTTAWA COMMUTERS ARE DIVERSE. IMPLEMENT A DIVERSE ARRAY OF SOLUTIONS TO HELP OTTAWA CELEBRATE EVERY TYPE OF TRAVELLER.

01



Bus LED signs celebrating different holidays such as Diwali and Hanukkah

02



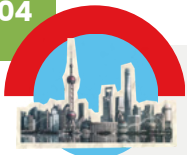
Implement a better system of courtesy that regulates music and inappropriate language

03



Provide factual information on the best ways to reduce congestion

04



Zoning and 15-minute city concepts

05



Develop and communicate expectations for rider and staff behaviour

06



Car-free spaces throughout communities

07



Encourage riders to talk and socialize while traveling

08



Provide reliable multi-modal options (bike + walk, bike + bus, park + bus)

SAFE WHILE TRAVELLING

PEOPLE WANT TO FEEL SAFE WHILE TRAVELLING. CENTRE SAFETY SO ALL TRAVELLERS GET TO THEIR DESTINATIONS SAFELY.

01



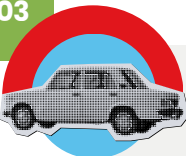
Eliminate or limit moments when riders are prohibited from deboarding buses and trains

02



Provide safe and accessible bike paths and lanes

03



Limit vehicle sizes in urban areas

04



Additional staff training on being approachable and how to respond when approached

05



Develop solutions to make it easier for patrons to protect each other, such as the "text 77777" safety program on the GO Transit in the Greater Toronto Area

RELIABLE & ACCOUNTABLE

TRAVELLERS VALUE PREDICTABLE COMMUTE TIMES. FOCUS ON BUILDING A RELIABLE AND ACCOUNTABLE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM TO BUILD TRUST IN RIDERSHIP.

01



Ensure transit operations are adequately funded, staffed, and equipped

02



Invest in new buses, trains, and equipment while transparently acknowledging shortcomings

03



More accurate GPS tracking and more frequent updates

04



Prioritize bus arrival and departure times to be relatively close to the posted schedule

05



Increase nighttime service on routes that are more frequented by youth, women, and those with disabilities

06



Improved coordination between routes and different modes of transportation. For example, building in more buffer time for late arrivals in key connection areas

THINKING FORWARD

DECISIONS MADE TODAY AFFECT COMMUTERS OF TOMORROW. TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE, WE MUST LET YOUNG PEOPLE ACTIVELY AND CONTINUOUSLY GUIDE OUR PLANNING.

01



Use language that youth feel is accessible and relatable during community consultations and on marketing and communication materials

02



Support young people in their communities and connect them to the main transportation arteries around the city

03



Meet youth where they are at: connect and engage young people in schools, community centres, and other places they learn, play, and socialize

04



Build the confidence of young people to take on meaningful roles in transportation planning by providing substantive engagement opportunities for youth

05



Use empathy and storytelling that resonates with young people

06



Empower youth by maintaining complete transparency about both the benefits and the challenges of Ottawa's transportation services

07



Ensure adequate and equitable transportation solutions in new housing developments, including close bus stops, maintained bike paths, traffic lights, and crosswalks

08



Increased frequency and forms of youth feedback and suggestions



ACCESS FOR ALL

ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATES CHOICE. DESIGN FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE AND LEAST PRIVILEGED SO THAT THE BEST PLACES IN OTTAWA ARE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE.

01



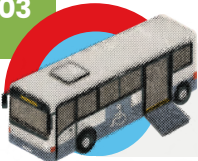
Begin every conversation and plan with accessibility and centre it throughout

02



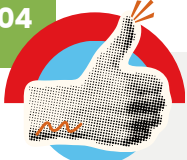
Barrier-free bus stops, heated bus stops in the winter, and shade in the summer

03



Increased availability of accessibility ramps and improved accessibility more generally

04



Focus on providing enjoyable transportation experiences no matter the chosen mode

05



Improve sidewalk frequency and conditions and design them for the people using them, not as an add-on after driveways and roads are installed

ACCESS FOR ALL

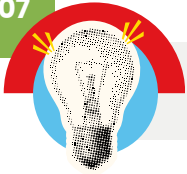
ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATES CHOICE. DESIGN FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE AND LEAST PRIVILEGED SO THAT THE BEST PLACES IN OTTAWA ARE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE.

06



Consider implications and equitability of short trips, as women are more likely to take shorter but more frequent trips on transit or by car

07



Provide good lighting and more frequent bus trips in isolated locations during the night

08



Better connect and provide more routes between communities, especially in the suburbs

09



More benches, separate cycling infrastructure, and more bus stops

10



Free transit

PERSONAS

PERSONAS ARE FICTIONAL CHARACTERS BASED ON OUR RESEARCH AND AGGREGATED DATA TO HELP DESIGNERS UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS, GOALS, AND FRUSTRATIONS OF YOUTH TRANSPORTATION USERS. PERSONAS HELP TO BUILD EMPATHY AND HUMANIZE THE DATA BY PROVIDING FICTIONAL STORIES BASED ON REAL PEOPLE, GOALS, AND BEHAVIOURS. PERSONAS HELP GUIDE DESIGN AND POLICY DECISIONS BY ILLUSTRATING HOW SIMILAR USERS WOULD INTERACT WITH DESIGN FEATURES IN A REAL-WORLD SETTING. ULTIMATELY, THOUGH, PERSONAS HELP TO KEEP DESIGN ABOUT USER NEEDS AND PRIORITIZE THE MOST URGENT PROBLEMS FIRST.





MEET JASMINE

BIOGRAPHY

Jasmine is a high school student in a suburban area who relies on biking and public transit. She faces challenges with unsafe cycling routes, unreliable buses, and travelling safely after dark. Balancing school, work, and social activities. She values independence and wants safer, more accessible transportation. She is also passionate about community involvement and wants youth voices to influence transportation decisions.

WANTS

- Reliable and accessible public transit, particularly during winter and late evenings
- Travel safely after dark, with better lighting, safer pathways, and more predictable service
- Improve transit to avoid expensive alternatives like rideshare services
- Strategies for safety such as travelling with friends, sharing her location, and careful route planning



(Female, 16, lives in Kanata)

INTERESTS

- Enjoys biking during good weather, especially with friends
- Participates in sports, school activities, social events, and works evening shifts
- Interested in community issues

FRUSTRATIONS

- Home is too far to walk, having to cycle through busy roads and longer routes
- Having to deal with snow-covered bus stops, long waits, and cancelled buses in the winter
- The mental burden of having to change plans and leave events early
- Public consultations are difficult to reach at times and places that work

“Whether I’m going to school, work, sports, or meeting friends, I’m always thinking about how I’m getting home safely.” **



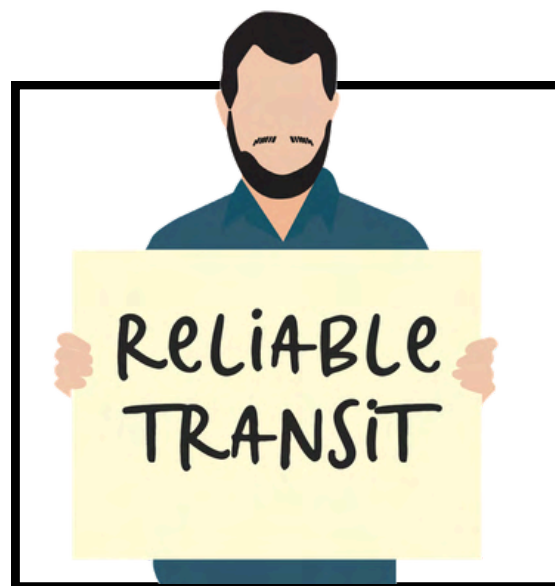
SAY HI TO JORDYN

BIOGRAPHY

Jordyn is a university student who lives relatively close to downtown and relies primarily on buses and trains to reach university, work, extracurricular activities, and community events. Living close to the city center still requires him to make multiple transfers, and inconsistent transit often affects his entire day. Transportation affects not only where he can go but also how involved he can be in academic, social, and civic life.

WANTS

- Reliable and consistent public transit with fewer delays and service disruptions.
- Faster commutes with fewer transfers and connections
- More time for studying, work, extracurricular activities, and social life
- Clear, timely communication about transit service



(Male, 19, lives in Vanier)

INTERESTS

- Socializing and spending time with friends and family
- Values reliability, clear communication, and meaningful opportunities for participation
- Community involvement and civic participation

FRUSTRATIONS

- A missed connection could lead to him missing class, arriving late to work, and losing social opportunities.
- Long and unpredictable commutes reduce the time available to study, work, volunteer, participate in extracurricular activities, and connect with friends and family.
- Winter weather makes commuting even more difficult and exhausting.

*“Reliable transit doesn’t just help me get to class—it lets me participate in my community.”***



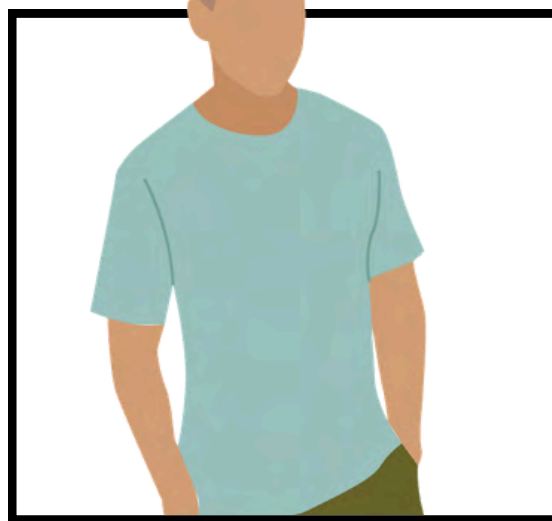
GREETINGS, CHARLIE

BIOGRAPHY

Charlie is a young professional with a hidden disability who lives in an eastern suburb and relies on his private vehicle because he finds public transportation to be unreliable and unsafe. His experience with public transportation is shaped long before he reaches a bus stop or transit station. As someone with a hidden disability, Charlie's needs may not always be visible to others, but the cumulative effect of inaccessible infrastructure, uncertainty, and limited alternatives creates additional barriers.

WANTS

- A transportation system that is reliable, flexible, and designed with a range of users in mind, recognizing that accessibility is a whole-system issue rather than a single feature.
- public transit as a realistic option through maintenance practices and infrastructure design



(Male, 21, lives in Orleans)

INTERESTS

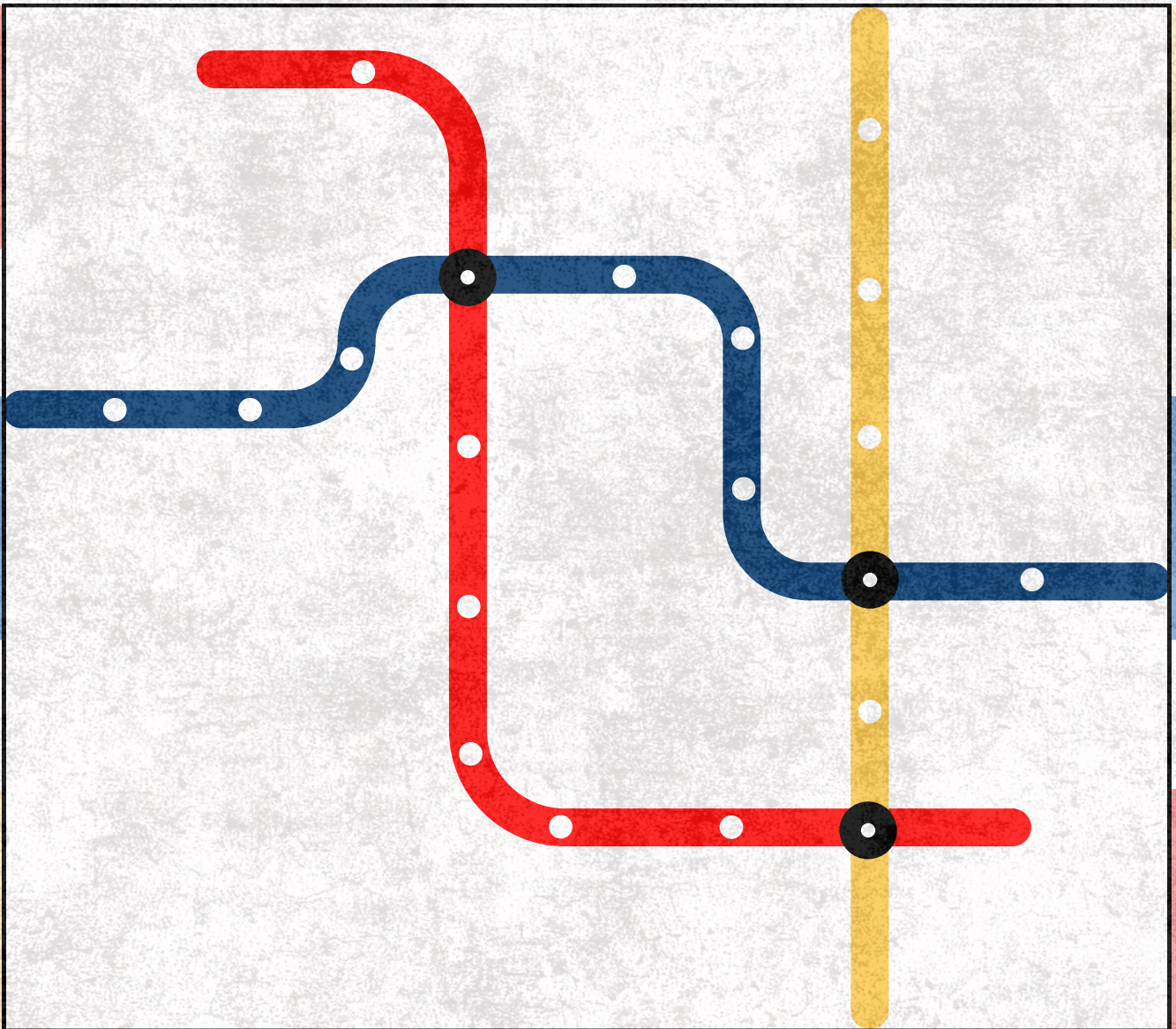
- Values independent travel, spontaneity, and flexibility, as plans can change throughout the day or week
- Life balance between work, social activities, other commitments, and time spent travelling between each

FRUSTRATIONS

- Uneven sidewalks, snow and ice, poorly maintained pathways, and gaps in walking and cycling infrastructure.
- Limited alternatives reduce his independence and ability to be spontaneous
- Poor flexibility makes it difficult when plans change throughout the day or week.

“Accessibility isn’t just about getting on the bus—it’s about whether the whole trip works.”**

JOURNEY MAPS



JOURNEY MAPS SHOW WHAT PEOPLE EXPERIENCE AS THEY GO THROUGH A PARTICULAR PROCESS. FOR THIS REPORT, THE MAPS WILL SHOW THE NEEDS, BARRIERS, FRICTION POINTS, AND EMOTIONS FACED BY TRANSPORTATION USERS AT DIFFERENT STAGES AS THEY NAVIGATE TRANSPORTATION IN OTTAWA.

KAYA'S JOURNEY

KAYA IS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT STUDYING BIOLOGY WHO WORKS PART-TIME AT A FACTORY TO AFFORD THE COST OF LIVING IN OTTAWA. AFTER SHE FINISHES HER EVENING SHIFT, SHE TAKES PUBLIC TRANSIT TO GET WELL-NEEDED REST AND PREPARE FOR HER 8AM LAB THE FOLLOWING DAY.



STARTING POINT

AFTER WORK, KAYA WALKS TO THE TRAIN STATION, AIMING TO TAKE THE TRAIN HOME.



TRAIN RIDE

WHEN ARRIVING AT THE TRAIN STATION, KAYA SEES THAT IT IS CANCELLED AND WILL HAVE TO TAKE THE R1 SUBSTITUTE



R1 BUS SUBSTITUTE

ON THE BUS SHE IS GREETED WITH LOUD MUSIC AND SCREAMING; WHEN LOOKING AROUND TO SEE IF HER FRUSTRATION WAS SHARED, SHE WAS MET BY RIDERS ALL GLUED TO THEIR PHONES AND CLOSED TO CONVERSATION



GOAL

AFTER THIS LONG JOURNEY, KAYA ARRIVES HOME TIRED, FRUSTRATED, AND HOPELESS. SHE ALSO ARRIVES LATER THAN PLANNED, WHICH RUINS HER MOOD FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE NIGHT

SARA'S JOURNEY

SARA IS A SECOND-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENT IN ENGINEERING LOOKING TO TAKE THE BUS TO COMPLETE HER EXAM THAT STARTS AT 10 AM. HER TRANSIT APP SAYS THAT HER TRIP SHOULD BE 30 MINUTES AND THAT THE NEXT BUS IS 10 MINUTES AWAY, GIVING HER PLENTY OF TIME.



STARTING POINT

SARA HAS A MIDTERM EXAM TODAY; SHE IS EXCITED AND WELL PREPARED TO TAKE IT. WHEN CHECKING THE TRANSIT APP TO KNOW WHEN SHE NEEDS TO LEAVE, IT SHOWS PLENTY OF TIME TO CATCH HER BUS



ARRIVAL TO THE STOP

ACCOUNTING FOR BUFFER TIME, SHE ARRIVES AT THE BUS STOP AT 9:15 AM WITH 5 MINUTES TO SPARE BEFORE THE BUS IS SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE.



FORCED ALTERNATIVE

HOWEVER, 5 MINUTES BECAME 30 MINUTES WITHOUT ANY INFORMATION ABOUT A SCHEDULE CHANGE FROM HER TRANSIT APP. FORCING HER TO PAY FOR AN UBER TO ARRIVE ON TIME FOR HER EXAM.

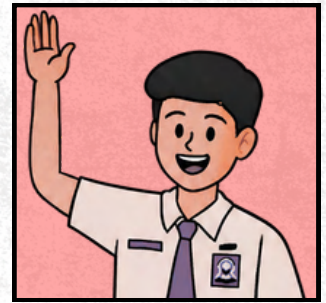


DECISION

AFTER HER EXAM, SHE DWELLS ON THE WASTED COST OF UBER AND QUESTIONS THE RELIABILITY OF PUBLIC TRANSIT. ULTIMATELY, SHE RETURNS HOME ANNOYED, LOOKING TO FIND A BETTER WAY TO GET TO UNIVERSITY NEXT TIME.

MARTIN'S JOURNEY

MARTIN IS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT WHO REGULARLY TAKES THE BUS TO SEE FRIENDS AND GO TO WORK. DESPITE REPEATEDLY EXPERIENCING UNRELIABLE SERVICE, CAUSING HIM TO ARRIVE LATE TO SHIFTS, HE DECIDES TO CONTINUE USING TRANSIT BECAUSE IT SEEMS TO BE HIS ONLY OPTION.



STARTING POINT

MARTIN NEEDS TO GET TO A HANG OUT WITH FRIENDS. WITH THE COST OF BUS PASSES RISING, HE CHOOSES TO TAKE HIS BIKE INSTEAD.



BIKE RIDE

WHILE ON THE WAY TO THE HANGOUT, HE SEES THAT HE HAS TO MAKE A CHOICE BETWEEN A MORE CAR-FILLED, BUT SPEEDY ROUTE OR A LONGER, SAFER ONE.



FASTER ROUTE

AFTER CHOOSING THE FASTER ROUTE TO MAKE SURE HE ARRIVES ON TIME, MARTIN HAS MANY DANGEROUS CLOSE ENCOUNTERS ON THE WAY. HE ARRIVES AT THE HANGOUT AND DREADS THE RIDE HOME.



DECISION

WHEN RETHINKING HIS OPTIONS AT THE END OF THE DAY, MARTIN IS ULTIMATELY FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN TWO IMPERFECT OPTIONS: A COST HE CANNOT PAY OR TRANSPORTATION THAT LEAVES HIM FEELING UNSAFE.

CONCLUSION

THIS REPORT IS INTENDED AS A PRACTICAL RESOURCE FOR ANYONE INVOLVED IN SHAPING TRANSPORTATION IN OTTAWA, INCLUDING POLICYMAKERS, TRANSIT PLANNERS, PRACTITIONERS, ADVOCATES, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS. IT IS BEST READ AS BOTH A RECORD OF WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SHARED AND A SET OF TOOLS FOR THINKING THROUGH HOW TRANSPORTATION CAN BETTER RESPOND TO THEIR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES. THE FINDINGS, DESIGN PRINCIPLES, PERSONAS, AND JOURNEY MAPS CAN BE USED TOGETHER TO UNDERSTAND USER NEEDS, IDENTIFY POINTS OF FRICTION, AND INFORM FUTURE CONVERSATIONS, POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND DESIGNS.

THE EXPERIENCES DOCUMENTED IN THIS REPORT PROVIDE GROUNDED INSIGHTS INTO THE WAYS TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS ARE EXPERIENCED IN EVERYDAY LIFE. WE ENCOURAGE READERS TO USE THESE INSIGHTS AS A STARTING POINT FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND AS A WAY TO BRING LIVED EXPERIENCE INTO TRANSPORTATION DECISION-MAKING.

ULTIMATELY, THE VALUE OF THIS REPORT LIES NOT ONLY IN IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES BUT ALSO IN HELPING CREATE BETTER QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW TRANSPORTATION SHOULD WORK FOR THE PEOPLE WHO RELY ON IT. YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE PARTNERS IN ANSWERING THOSE QUESTIONS, NOT SIMPLY CONSULTED AFTER DECISIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE.



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Change Makers Club
of Canada 

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YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON OTTAWA TRANSPORTATION, REPORT COMMITTEE

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