Management & Leadership
Performance Objectives - OCTranspo

(1400 words, 5-10 min. read)

OCTranspo provides public transport - bus and light rail - to the city of Ottawa.

When I moved to Ottawa in the early 1980s, the system worked well. Like the mail carrier, who delivers and the show must go on, OCTranspo was a reliable service in all weather and at all times of day.

The bus service has been in decline for a while.

During a local election campaign, like many other Mayors and politicians of all flavours, the four leading candidates for the Mayor's chair in this municipal election talk the good talk. But translate that talk into actions that improve the service!

OCTranspo's management and leadership haven't delivered in a very long while. Tinkering with fares and schedules won't do it.

Attitudes have to change.

Let’s revisit some fundamentals.

In public transport, there are three groups of people.

A. Those with little choice or who must use the service.
B. Those who have a choice.
C. Those who will never use the service.

Management and leadership must focus on groups A and B, who likely share the same needs, though in a different order and with different levels of importance.

The management challenge is to create conditions that encourage group B to ride. This will improve the service for all!

Ridership levels and how the service is financed do not influence passenger experiences. What considerations influence a positive ridership experience?

1. Can you get from point A to Point B by bus?
2. How long does the trip take?
3. How many different buses are involved?
4. How much walking is involved?
5. How often does the bus arrive and depart on time?
6. Does the bus have what I need for the journey?
7. Is the bus clean inside and out?
8. Are the staff typically courteous?

9. What does the trip cost?

Translate these considerations into performance objectives. Meet the objectives, and ridership will go up. Ridership is an outcome and not a performance objective.

Performance Objectives

Practicality (Considerations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 9)

The answers to the following questions assess this.

1. How far is the walk at both ends of the transit journey? 250, 500, 1000 metres, more than 1000 metres?
2. How many bus changes are required? It depends on the journey length. None is great; one or two is OK? Three or more is a negative?
3. How long is the journey? It depends on the journey length. Thirty minutes is a long time to spend on one bus. But if one bus is all that is required, that is not bad at all.
4. Is the fare fair?

Practicality Objectives

Target levels are expressed as a percentage of the whole within the service area.

1. Establish the target levels for the number of buildings and public destination green spaces within 500, 500 to 1000 and more than 1000m of a transit stop. (Consider converting these buildings and green spaces to people equivalents?)
2. Create stop pairings for all stops in the service area.
    a. How many connections does it take to connect each stop pairing? Establish current and future target levels (as a percentage of the whole) for less than 1, 1, 2, 3 or more connections.
    b. How long does it take (average) to connect each stop pairing by schedule? Establish current and future target levels for less than 20 mins, 20-30 mins, 30-40 mins, and greater than 40 mins.
3. Establish current levels, monitor them, and publish monthly progress toward the target.

If fares aren't completely outrageous, when the route, stop map and schedule match the populations needs, practicality will be high.

Suggestion to OCTranspo Management

It would be very interesting to see what an AI would do with this problem, which applies to all public transit organizations everywhere. Provide an AI with:

1. A map of the city showing all buildings, destination open-air spaces, and roads where buses would be permitted.
2. Access to Google Maps traffic patterns for about a week.

3. Answers to questions 1, 2, and 3 above.

Review the results. Do they make sense? Adjust the parameters and improve as required.

Reliability & Punctuality (Considerations 5)

I read in the CBC Ottawa press the other day that bus punctuality is measured when the bus leaves the terminal or starts its journey. In this day and age? Seriously! How long has the new GM has been around without fixing that sorry state of affairs!

Passengers don't care if a bus leaves the terminal on time. They also don't really care if a bus doesn't leave the terminal at all! What they care about is a bus shows up and drops them off at their stops when they expect it. Simple!

Passengers give buses some flexibility and, when able, arrive at a bus stop before the scheduled departure time. It feels very negative to arrive early at a bus stop and see the back of your bus disappear down the street!

There must be a time window around bus stops. Example: Buses must not depart more than 2 minutes before their scheduled time and must arrive no more than 5 minutes late. Performance outside this window should be assessed as a service failure.

Bus schedules must adjust to varying, predictable traffic patterns throughout the day. An AI should be able to help with this.

Reliability Objectives

1. Arrive at a bus stop no more than five minutes late and depart no more than two minutes early.
2. Aggregate successful service events for the stop, route and city for the day.
3. Establish current performance and future performance targets - percentage of successful events - for the city.
4. Monitor and publish monthly progress to target.

Human Factors (HF) (Considerations 6 and 7)

Compared with OCTranspo buses, European buses are often more comfortable, quieter, and cleaner, with features such as always-available charging ports, Wi-Fi access, and sometimes tables between facing chairs. North American bus industry should take note, as the car industry did toward the end of the 20th century.

Comfort relates to the vehicle's age. For example, around the eight-year mark, comfort levels usually differ noticeably from a new car. What is that number for a bus? How does that compare with rising maintenance costs, which indicate when the accountant would replace it?

It is disrespectful to expect passengers to use dirty buses, including dirty or grainy windows that are improperly washed. All of this leads to passenger discomfort.

HF Objectives

1. Develop a maximum bus life that properly considers user comfort.
2. Establish and execute seasonal cleaning specifications and intervals that improve the rider experience.
3. Monitor, report and publish monthly for compliance.

Suggestions to OCTranpo Management, local, provincial and federal politicians.

Automated work (robots) is an option today.

Some people, perhaps on some form of benefits, might also appreciate an opportunity to work.

Price Point and Affordability

Price point is a political decision. Costs drive affordability.

What do we want to know about costs? For example, trends in capital and operating costs for the prior and next five years, in $ and as a percentage of the whole for the list below.

1. Infrastructure
   a. Passenger vehicles
   b. Routes
   c. Maintenance facilities and services
   d. Administrative facilities and services
2. People
   a. Management and leadership
      i. Corporate
      ii. Maintenance
      iii. Administrative
      iv. Vehicle operations
   b. Maintenance workforce
   c. Administrative workforce
   d. Vehicle operations workforce
3. Energy for passenger vehicles
   a. Hydro
   b. Gas
   c. Diesel.
   d. Other, Hydrogen?

Cost trends, along with progress against the other ten performance objectives, will show whether management and leadership have the talent, knowledge, and skills to do the job.

If they can't, we have to develop them. This is a town of a million people.

Don't say we don't have the necessary talent within our city!

Of course we do. We have to bring them along properly.

Mayor Sutcliffe: It will also support the upload (of budget costs to the Province) issue in the city's favour.

Courtesy

Courtesy starts from the very top, in words and deeds!

Be courteous to taxpayers. Publish and report against performance objectives in language your riders can relate to. Use hours and minutes, trend graphs that show a picture, and budget groups that show taxpayers' money is spent where it should be, and in the right relative amounts.

Mayor Sutcliffe,

What about it?

The above is an example of how to develop a viable set of performance objectives that demonstrate progress!

If you don't like my numbers, please insert your own.

But have the courtesy to your City to publish your performance objectives for OCTranspo management, stand by them, and insist that OCTranspo management report publicly against them to show how the service is improving.

Additionally, Bruce Deachman in the Ottawa Citizen challenged you to use the bus service. Why not add all members of the City Council and the two most senior levels of OCTranspo's management to that challenge, from December 1st 2026, through May 1st 2027, for all work-related activities.

No ifs, ands, or buts about it!

Up Next

A closer look at Senior Civil Service management and leadership. I anticipate several parts to this.

If you like what I write here, you are going to like my book.