



UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL POSITION PAPER ON

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND TRANSIT



Legislative History

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As an organization created to empower and support our students throughout their educational experience, it is particularly important to acknowledge and recognize the power of education as a tool for healing and reconciliation. The USC always seeks to empower students on our campus to voice their perspectives on the issues that matter most to them, but we must recognize that there is still immense work to be done, at the USC and across Western's campus. We must remain active in our process of learning and unlearning to ensure that we take responsibility for educating ourselves on the history of the lands that we are situated upon and their impacts on those that lived upon them first.

With this, we wish to acknowledge that Western University and our Affiliate Colleges are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.



DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the students who have lost their lives in a pedestrian-related incident. The USC is committed to fighting for a safe community where students not only feel safe, but are safe. We built this position paper in hopes to address the many concerns that we have heard from our campus community regarding the safety of pedestrians.



INTRODUCTION

A student's commute to and from campus can make or break their university experience. Unreliable transit, unusable sidewalks, poorly-lit student neighbourhoods, and poorly-planned construction zones can be barriers for post-secondary students to participate in campus life.

While vital in getting students to and from campus, an effective transit service also provides students with more choice about where they live, enables them to participate in extracurricular activities and jobs, and allows them to access the community outside of campus.

Students are also pedestrians. Whether they live on-campus, in the neighbourhoods around campus, or further afield, students will inevitably end up walking somewhere: to classes, from a bus stop, or home from a late night of studying in the library. Regardless of the time of day or night, pedestrians should feel safe on their walking route. This includes well lit walkways and safe routes in areas where pedestrians interact with vehicle traffic.

Students may also need to travel to different communities across Ontario in order to participate in Work Integrated Learning opportunities, or fulfil class requirements such as placements or practicums. Those without personal vehicles may face challenges in accessing areas that are not well serviced by public transportation, or may encounter financial hardships by having to rent a car or pay for taxi services to get to their destination. And many students are also increasingly concerned about the environmental impacts of overcrowded roads and highways and would prefer to use more sustainable modes of transit such as buses or electric trains.

Through consultation with students, informal and formal feedback initiatives, and discussions with the City of London and Western, the Pedestrian Safety & Transit Position Paper presents the following recommendations to our university and government stakeholders to ensure that steps are taken towards improved pedestrian safety measures and transportation options for post-secondary students.



RECOMMENDATIONS

CONSTRUCTION:

1. The City of London, and all stakeholders involved with the upcoming road construction project at Western and Sarnia Roads, must ensure that students are able to easily and safely access campus by providing accessible pedestrian routes around road construction zones at all times.
2. The City of London and the London Transit Commission (LTC) should incorporate student feedback into plans to address vehicle congestion and traffic flow during road work from both a pedestrian safety perspective, and to reduce the disruption to public transportation that students rely on to access campus.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY:

1. Western University should conduct student and staff surveys every two years in order to identify areas on campus that are poorly lit and feel unsafe, making those areas a priority for improved lighting as per their strategic plan, Towards Western at 150.
2. The City of London should revise its current policy of improving on-street lighting, moving from a model where homeowners must request and fully pay for the associated costs, to one where the City takes full responsibility for the cost as a matter of infrastructure improvement.
3. Western University should hold regular consultations with student groups to determine what a pedestrian friendly campus should look like.

TRANSPORTATION:

1. The London Transit Commission (LTC) should commit to increasing the number and frequency of buses to and around campus during peak times to avoid full buses bypassing students who are waiting at bus stops. Service improvements to be made by LTC should also include timely notification of route changes, detours, and delays to allow passengers to plan their trips accordingly.
2. The City of London should implement the Rapid Transit North and West routes to improve traffic flow, provide faster access to campus for students living in those areas, and allow students housed on and off-campus to better connect with jobs and activities in other parts of the city.



3. The Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario should provide funding for and develop more transit routes to under-serviced and remote areas, allowing students to better access work integrated learning and professional placements.
4. The creation of a High-Speed or High-Frequency rail line connecting cities throughout Southwestern Ontario should be a priority for both Federal and Provincial governments in order to address vehicle congestion on highways and promote a more sustainable method of travel.



CONSTRUCTION

Over the next few years, major road reconstruction projects around Western University could impact the safety of students as they travel to and from campus. Navigating through frequently changing construction zones and detours will add complications for students walking as well as those who arrive by vehicle. Students with mobility aids like wheelchairs will likely face additional challenges with surfaces (gravel, holes) and barriers (paving transitions, curbs, stairs) for the duration of the project. Traffic congestion will lead to heightened levels of frustration and could result in an increase of vehicle-pedestrian accidents in the area. It is important that the disruptions to students are as minimal as possible, and safety is made a priority through thoughtful and well executed planning.

- 1. THE CITY OF LONDON, AND ALL STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED WITH THE UPCOMING ROAD CONSTRUCTION PROJECT AT WESTERN AND SARNIA ROADS, MUST ENSURE THAT STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO EASILY AND SAFELY ACCESS CAMPUS BY PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE PEDESTRIAN ROUTES AROUND ROAD CONSTRUCTION ZONES AT ALL TIMES.**

Major roadwork at the intersection of Western Road and Sarnia Road is scheduled to begin in 2025 and last for a number of years.¹ Scheduled work will include safety improvements for pedestrians, the addition of bus lanes and bays, and dedicated bicycle lanes. Students have been championing these improvements for years; however, the disruptions resulting from a multi-year project will cause numerous challenges for students accessing this portion of campus. Student safety and ease of access to the campus during this time must be a priority for the City of London, London Transit Commission (LTC), Western University, and the construction companies involved in the project. It is imperative that the major stakeholders address student safety, traffic volumes, and campus accessibility by providing well designed and accessible pedestrian detours, convenient transit stops, and efficient traffic flow in order to prevent undue hardships to students.

An extended inter-campus road closure during September and October 2024 resulted in heavy traffic congestion on the roads around campus, disrupted transit routes, and made pedestrian access to campus a challenge. It demonstrates the need for thorough planning ahead of a long range construction project as during this time period, three pedestrians were hit by vehicles on the streets adjacent to campus², compared to a total

¹ City of London, Western Road and Sarnia Road/Philip Aziz Avenue Intersection Improvements, 2024. <https://getinvolved.london.ca/westernsarnia>

² (a) Toporowski, Finn. 2024. "Pedestrian struck by car outside Ivey." The Gazette, September 25, 2024. (b) Bicknell, Bryan. 2024. "Pedestrian fighting for life in hospital after overnight crash near Western." CTV News London, September 12, 2024. (c) Dewan, Jerry. 2024. "Striking Western worker hit by driver: CUPE." CTV News London, September 19, 2024.



of 10 non-fatal vehicle-pedestrian collisions in the Western Road and Sarnia Road areas during a six year span.³ It is logical to assume that the delays and confusion caused during a multi-year construction project could result in additional accidents as students and vehicles attempt to navigate a congested and frequently changing landscape. An increase in accidents would be unacceptable and preventable with the proper safety measures in place.

Institutions such as Toronto Metropolitan University and Purdue University⁴ have created safety videos to assist students in safely navigating roadways and construction zones. We strongly recommend that similar methods are employed here to help raise awareness of both pedestrians and motorists.

2. THE CITY OF LONDON AND THE LONDON TRANSIT COMMITTEE (LTC) SHOULD INCORPORATE STUDENT FEEDBACK INTO PLANS TO ADDRESS VEHICLE CONGESTION AND TRAFFIC FLOW DURING ROAD WORK FROM BOTH A PEDESTRIAN SAFETY PERSPECTIVE, AND TO REDUCE THE DISRUPTION TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION THAT STUDENTS RELY ON TO ACCESS CAMPUS.

Large volumes of vehicle and pedestrian traffic utilize inter-campus roads and the Western and Sarnia Road intersection on a regular basis. Traffic data shows that over 20,000 vehicles use campus roads daily; approximately 50 per cent of these are drivers simply passing through campus to access other major arteries.⁵ The intersection at Western and Sarnia Road services over 41,000 vehicles,⁶ 11,810 pedestrians, and 203 cyclists each day⁷ and volumes are only going to increase as the City of London continues to grow, and Western University looks to enlarge the student population. Additionally, LTC ridership is three times greater in the campus area than anywhere else in London.⁸ Between 2015 and 2021 there were an average of 80 road accidents per year occurring on this stretch of roadway as a result of high traffic volumes.⁹ Major road work at this intersection is going to increase the current congestion and frustration levels among all involved.

3 There were 10 non-fatal vehicle-pedestrian accidents recorded here between 2015 and 2021 according to Western Road and Sarnia Road/Philip Aziz Avenue Corridor and Intersection, Municipal Class Environmental Assessment-Environmental Study Report, prepared by the City of London (London, ON, 2023).

4 Toronto Metropolitan University and Ellis Don Construction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6o7L-Ysq3A>, Purdue Safety Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPHZyFD23T0>

5 Western Campus Safety and Emergency Services 2024 Annual Report, prepared by Western University (London, ON, 2024).

6 Western Road and Sarnia Road/Philip Aziz Avenue Corridor and Intersection, Municipal Class Environmental Assessment-Environmental Study Report," prepared by the City of London (London, ON, 2023).

7 Newcombe, Daryl. 2023. "City may redesign intersection upgrade over pedestrian safety." CTV News London, April 12, 2023.

8 Newcombe, Daryl. 2023. "City may redesign intersection upgrade over pedestrian safety." CTV News London, April 12, 2023.

9 Between 2015 and 2021 there were 222 mid block collisions and 260 intersection collisions on Western Road-Sarnia Road-Philip Aziz Drive. Western Road and Sarnia Road/Philip Aziz Avenue Corridor and Intersection, Municipal Class Environmental Assessment-Environmental Study Report," prepared by the City of London (London, ON, 2023).



In a perfect storm of back-to-school ridership, city-wide road construction, and the closure of inter-campus roadways, approximately 42 per cent of LTC buses ran behind schedule during September 1-15, 2024.¹⁰

City-wide, passengers complained about having to catch their bus an hour earlier than normal in an attempt to arrive at their destination on time, buses not showing up at all, and challenges finding bus stops due to last minute location changes.¹¹ Post-secondary students were particularly impacted by the disruptions due to their ridership volumes and heavy reliance on public transit. Students took to various social media channels to share their frustrations at the resulting delays in getting to campus, missing classes, trying to navigate abrupt bus route changes, and general difficulties getting around campus, especially for those with health and mobility issues.

With post-secondary students representing the largest rider demographic and accounting for approximately half of all LTC trips,¹² students' opinions are integral to mitigating inconveniences for users. A significant portion of LTC's revenues are the result of a mandatory student bus pass and it is a reasonable expectation that students are provided with convenient, efficient, and timely transit in return. Forums allowing students to raise their concerns before and during construction must be part of the process, and the LTC must work to mitigate service disruptions to the best of its abilities.

¹⁰ Seguin, Kendra, 2024. Waiting for the bus? "Half of all London buses were delayed in September," CBC, September 20, 2024.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² London Transit Five Year Ridership Growth Strategy Final Report, 2019.



PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Pedestrian safety is commonly associated with vehicle traffic and roadway crossings, but it also includes elements of physical upkeep like accessible, even walking surfaces and personal safety features such as lighting. Students have identified areas of inadequate lighting that leave them feeling unsafe when walking on campus, and in the neighborhoods where they live. Improving lighting in these areas would help students feel more secure when they have to walk alone after dark.

1. **WESTERN UNIVERSITY SHOULD CONDUCT STUDENT AND STAFF SURVEYS EVERY TWO YEARS IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY AREAS ON CAMPUS THAT ARE POORLY LIT AND FEEL UNSAFE, MAKING THOSE AREAS A PRIORITY FOR IMPROVED LIGHTING AS PER THE STRATEGIC PLAN TOWARDS WESTERN AT 150.**

Western Safety performs yearly campus safety audits and indicates that anyone on campus is welcome to report areas of concern.¹³ Initiating an outreach survey asking staff and students to identify low light/unsafe areas would raise awareness of how to report issues, and help to highlight areas and times when students feel unsafe on campus.

In an effort to make quicker and more impactful updates to campus lighting, Western University should create an interactive map as part of a campus safety campaign, allowing students to place a pin on areas of concern. A visual display would help to prioritize lighting remedies based on the concentration of notifications.

2. **THE CITY OF LONDON SHOULD REVISE ITS CURRENT POLICY OF IMPROVING ON-STREET LIGHTING, MOVING FROM A MODEL WHERE HOMEOWNERS MUST REQUEST AND FULLY PAY FOR THE ASSOCIATED COSTS, TO ONE WHERE THE CITY TAKES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COST AS A MATTER OF INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT.**

Adequate street lighting is crucial not only for feelings of personal safety and crime prevention, but also so that pedestrians and cyclists are easily visible to motorists. Several of London's strategic plans and guiding documents emphasize the importance of lighting for all of these reasons, and in particular, to increase the safety of women and girls.¹⁴ With 22 percent of city streets and 44 percent of major roads in darkness, improvements to lighting should figure heavily in infrastructure improvement plans.¹⁵

¹³ Western Campus Safety & Emergency Services 2022 Annual Report, prepared by Western University (London ON, 2022).

¹⁴ Plans and documents include The London Plan, Safe Cities London Action Plan, Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, A Safe Place for Women and Girls and Scoping Study conducted in 2020, London's Street Design Policy.

¹⁵ De Bono, Norman, 2019. "Bright idea: City hall may pick up larger share of tab for street lights," The London Free Press, March 4, 2019.



New subdivisions are required to include street lighting as part of their plans; however, there is a lack of recourse to retrofit lighting in older neighbourhoods which currently have low or no lighting. As of 2018, the only way to add a street light would be for individual property owner(s) to enlist the support of three out of four adjoining properties to install lighting at their own shared expense (\$7,200 at that time). For tenants, including the vast majority of students in London, this program is inaccessible. For landlords, especially those who live out of the area, there is little incentive to participate in such a cost sharing arrangement. The City's website indicates that light audits or new lights can be installed on unlit streets under the Street Light Local Improvement Program,¹⁶ but details of this program are not easily accessible to the public.

Students have identified a number of areas in neighbourhoods surrounding campus where lighting is poor to inadequate, in particular: Epworth Avenue, Patricia Street, Meadowdown Drive, University Crescent, and the pedestrian/cycle path leading from Richmond Street to University Crescent. The pedestrian pathway opens onto a stretch of University Crescent that has a single street light between the terminus of the pathway and Brough Street. Meadowdown Drive is lit by a carriage lamp on the front property of a single residential unit. Light fixtures on the other streets listed above, are long arm fixtures mounted on utility poles (one arm-one head), spaced irregularly on one side of the street.

Western University's latest census shows that approximately 59 per cent of students identified themselves as "woman" (equalling approximately 16,600 female undergraduates living in the neighbourhoods and walking on the streets immediately around campus).¹⁷ Women aged 15-24 years are the most likely demographic to experience sexual violence, and 15-25 per cent of post-secondary students are likely to experience sexual assault at some point during their academic journey¹⁸ so it is imperative that the City of London take concerns voiced by students seriously. Lighting as a preventative measure against sexual violence is noted in Anova's Safe Cities London Scoping Study 2020,¹⁹ with respondents indicating that well lit areas increased their feelings of safety and allowed women to better see if they were being watched or followed.

The City of London should follow the example set by the City of Oakville where, based on a community request for the installation of new lighting, an audit is performed to compare levels of lighting in a particular area to the City's current standards.²⁰ If

16 "Report a Traffic, Cycling, or Streetlight Concern," Service London, accessed September 27, 2024, <https://service.london.ca/service-requests/report-traffic-concern/>.

17 Woman meaning female or female identifying. The Western Equity Census, prepared by Western University (London, ON 2022).

18 "Violence Against Young Women," Western's Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, accessed September 27, 2024, <https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/infographics/vawyoung/index.html>.

19 Safe Cities London Scoping Study, prepared by ANOVA (London, ON, 2020).

20 oakville.ca/transportation-roads/roads-sidewalks/street-lighting/

improvements are necessary, the City then takes measures to bring these areas up to community standards as part of the cost of normal infrastructure upgrades. At a minimum, London should review their policy and subsidize a significant portion of the costs since the provision of lighting is a municipal concern, similar to sidewalks and other infrastructure that property owners are not required to pay specially for.

In the meantime, the City of London should conduct a review of the lighting in the above noted areas, specifically noting locations where the current lighting fixtures create only small pockets of light in an otherwise dark area, and immediately replace old lightbulbs with LED bulbs in order to increase light saturation.

3. WESTERN UNIVERSITY SHOULD HOLD REGULAR CONSULTATIONS WITH STUDENT GROUPS TO DETERMINE WHAT A PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY CAMPUS SHOULD LOOK LIKE.

Western University's current strategic plan²¹ includes the goal to reduce traffic on campus (there is a requirement to provide vehicle access to University Hospital, so the campus will never be completely closed to through-traffic). The road closure during September and October 2024 is giving students an example of what it would be like to have a predominantly vehicle-free campus. Concerns have been raised about the resulting congestion outside of campus, bus delays, a lack of campus-core bus stops, and overall accessibility, particularly for those with health and/or mobility issues who are finding that navigating across campus by foot is a challenge. Western University must consult regularly with students to ensure that a reduction in vehicles on campus does not cause undue hardship for the campus community.

²¹ Towards Western at 150, produced by the Office of the President (London, ON, 2021)



TRANSPORTATION

Students rely heavily on local transportation networks to get to school, work, and enable them to participate in extracurricular activities. Many choose their accommodations based on proximity to bus stops or routes that provide direct access to campus. In exchange for a mandatory bus pass as part of their ancillary fees, students expect buses to run on time and be plentiful enough that over-capacity buses do not regularly by-pass designated stops.

When students without access to a personal vehicle need to travel to areas outside of London for schooling purposes, or to visit home, they must often rely on pre-determined rail or coach routes, and take expensive cabs to access more remote areas. An improved infrastructure of well-linked community buses and high speed or high frequency rail service would provide students with more economical travel options to less accessible areas, and have the added benefit of being more environmentally sustainable.

- 1. THE LONDON TRANSIT COMMISSION (LTC) SHOULD COMMIT TO INCREASING THE NUMBER AND FREQUENCY OF BUSES TO AND AROUND CAMPUS DURING PEAK TIMES TO AVOID FULL BUSES BYPASSING STUDENTS WHO ARE WAITING AT BUS STOPS. SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS TO BE MADE BY LTC SHOULD ALSO INCLUDE TIMELY NOTIFICATION OF ROUTE CHANGES, DETOURS AND DELAYS TO ALLOW PASSENGERS TO PLAN THEIR TRIPS ACCORDINGLY.**

The student demographic provides a significant financial contribution to the LTC's fare revenues,²² and accounts for half of all bus trips taken.²³ Post-secondary students feel that their transportation needs are not being well met in terms of service delivery, with commonly reported issues of full buses failing to stop for students, crowding, running off schedule, lack of real-time service indicators, and limited communications about route changes/detours.

In 2019, the LTC issued a final report²⁴ detailing their five year strategy to increase ridership. They identified post secondary students as a key demographic for bus use, and referenced survey results showing that only 16% of students rated their experiences with transit as “good” or “excellent”, citing issues with convenience, travel time, and wait times.²⁵ Part of LTC's commitment to improve service included gaining a better

22 According to LTC's 2023 Conventional Transit Service Performance Report, the tuition pass represented \$10.1 million in fares out of a total of \$18.4 million which included cash, tickets and monthly passes. <https://www.londontransit.ca/staff-report-5-2023-conventional-transit-service-performance-report/>

23 London Transit Five Year Ridership Growth Strategy Final Report, 2019.

24 London Transit Five Year Ridership Growth Strategy Final Report, 2019.

25 Ibid.



understanding of the needs of students, and orienting services towards an increase in student ridership.

THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL (USC) CONDUCTED ITS OWN TRANSIT SURVEY IN 2024 AND FOUND THAT:

- Almost 50% of students use the bus daily and 26% use it 3-5 times per week
- 51% experience issues: buses don't stop (full), detours, delays, cancellations
- 15% report full buses pass them by daily, 25% report that this is a regular occurrence
- 28% regularly find buses are delayed by more than 10 minutes
- 34% found getting around the city by transit somewhat easy
- 49% found that alternate dedicated transit was far superior (ie. exam shuttle/uber/taxi)
- 44% felt service levels fell below expectations in terms of value for money

In comparing issues that students identified in 2019, and those of the USC's 2024 survey, very little has been done by LTC to improve student-focused service in the intervening five years. The LTC must recognize the significant ridership represented by post-secondary students and better attune their service solutions to meet students' needs.

The LTC has indicated that communication plans are to be implemented in 2024 to raise awareness about finding service information, including on-time performance, and to better address detour and temporary stop signage.²⁶ The LTC should look at proactive communication tactics and outreach to students. For example, a booth on campus during early September would provide an excellent opportunity to educate thousands of students on the services available, as well as gather direct feedback. This could also prove beneficial as an education piece for the many students who arrive in London from other municipalities, provinces and countries where transit services are vastly different.

²⁶ 2023 Conventional Transit Service Performance Report, Staff Report #5 February 28, 2024. <https://www.londontransit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Staff-Report-5-Conventional-Service-Customer-Service-Report.pdf>



2. THE CITY OF LONDON SHOULD IMPLEMENT THE RAPID TRANSIT NORTH AND WEST ROUTES TO IMPROVE TRAFFIC FLOW, PROVIDE FASTER ACCESS TO CAMPUS FOR STUDENTS LIVING IN THOSE AREAS, AND ALLOW STUDENTS HOUSED ON AND OFF-CAMPUS TO BETTER CONNECT WITH JOBS AND ACTIVITIES IN OTHER PARTS OF THE CITY.

The City of London has declared a climate emergency,²⁷ and part of the solution as outlined in the Climate Emergency Action Plan²⁸ and the Mobility Master Plan²⁹ is to reduce personal vehicle emissions by 35 per cent by improving mass transit and making it a more attractive alternative for commuters. The building of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes and dedicated bus lanes throughout the city is intended to encourage more people to take the bus instead of personal vehicles, ultimately reducing traffic congestion and carbon emissions. Unfortunately, in 2019 London City Council elected to cancel the proposed North and West branches of the BRT route.³⁰ In September 2024, the roadway designations for Clarence Street, Richmond Street and Western Road, as well as a proposed transit village location were downgraded,³¹ essentially closing the book on the North BRT route. The transit village designations for the West route currently remain intact.

In removing the rapid transit designation from the North Route, and particularly Richmond Street, there will be no opportunity to create dedicated bus lanes or allow for a true express service model to expand access from the east side of campus. This area is not particularly well serviced by public transit as only a limited number of buses enter the campus core from the east, and the only express route stops outside the campus gates requiring students to walk in. Due to the geographical layout of campus, better service from the east side should be a priority, including an express route that enters campus.

By comparison, a number of buses and two express routes stop on the west side of campus allowing students direct access to classrooms with a very limited walk. Mayor Josh Morgan has proposed a new BRT route following Wharncliffe and Western Roads,³² and if this can be accomplished in conjunction with proposed road improvements, would limit additional transit disruptions and provide students with increased services on the West side of campus.

27 “London’s climate emergency declaration,” City of London, Ontario, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://london.ca/living-london/water-environment/londons-climate-emergency-declaration>.

28 Climate Emergency Action Plan, prepared by City of London (London, ON, 2022).

29 “Mobility Master Plan,” City of London, Ontario, accessed October 11, 2024. <https://london.ca/living-london/roads-sidewalks-transportation/mobility-master-plan>

30 “Council officially bids farewell to north and west BRT routes- for now,” CBC London, March 27, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/london-ontario-bus-rapid-transit-1.5073014>

31 Moulton, Jack. 2024. “Still dreaming of (or fearing) rapid transit in north London? You can likely stop now.” The London Free Press, September 19, 2024.

32 Newcome, Daryl. 2024. “From the ashes: New vision emerging for a Bus Rapid Transit route to north London,” CTV News London, September 14, 2024.



Keeping up with the rapid growth of the city³³ requires forward thinking, including anticipating improvements for transit that will benefit areas of the city that are growing now and will continue to grow in the future. Residents have expressed concerns over the current levels of traffic congestion at Oxford Street and Wonderland Road, which are only going to increase as the subdivisions West of Byron continue to expand, and residential densification projects in the Oxford and Beaverbrook areas commence. A traffic impact report done ahead of a proposed apartment complex in this area confirms that there will be additional “delays, lineups of traffic and poor levels of service” during various times of the day.³⁴ This future growth may be the incentive needed to re-introduce the BRT West plan for this area of the city.³⁵ Current bus service in the newest West London subdivisions is very limited, so the introduction of an improved transit service would be timely and allow it to become established along with the growth of the community.

By improving access to campus on the North and East sides with express routes that enter the campus core, and implementing the Rapid Transit Route West, students will have faster access to campus allowing them to live in areas outside of crowded near-campus- neighbourhoods, and it will enable them to better connect with jobs and activities in other parts of London.

3. THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO SHOULD PROVIDE FUNDING FOR AND DEVELOP MORE TRANSIT ROUTES TO UNDER-SERVED AND REMOTE AREAS, ALLOWING STUDENTS TO BETTER ACCESS WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL PLACEMENTS.

Many areas of the province are not easily accessible without a personal vehicle. Passenger train service in Ontario tends to follow a main corridor from Windsor to Ottawa, with intermittent service to smaller communities outside of this area. With the demise of Greyhound, the remaining coach services are focused on larger metropolitan areas along Highway 401, leaving other communities isolated and without well-connected transit systems. Students may find that their only remaining options are taxis, rideshares, or car rentals. The cost of using these services can be prohibitive, especially for those who may already be paying for accommodations during practicums or placements.

33 London has been one of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada over the past several years, with a current population of over 600,000 people in the London census metropolitan area. Conjectures based on estimates provided by the Finance Minister, have London's population reaching 880,000 people by 2051.

Moulton, Jack. 2024. “608,403: Booming London area passes a population milestone,” The London Free Press, May 24, 2024.

Juha, Jonathan. 2024. “London-area population on pace for 880,000 by 2051,” Londoner, October 10, 2024.

34 Moulton, Jack. 2024. “Towers, traffic headaches and one politician’s concern over ‘bad infill,’” The London Free Press, May 23, 2024.

35 Moulton, Jack. 2024. “Traffic, transit worries surface as 25-storey Wonderland Road tower debated.” The London Free Press, April 9, 2024.

The growth of inter-community transit services throughout southern Ontario³⁶ is promising, but there needs to be additional infrastructure to connect these routes together to provide seamless access to areas throughout Ontario. As it stands, a passenger would still need to drive from one terminus point to another in order to gain access to the next community route. Currently co-funded by individual municipalities, and the Provincial Government, the costs for these services should be absorbed by the government in order to continue to expand the services into additional underserved areas, including Ontario's Far North.

4. THE CREATION OF A HIGH-SPEED OR HIGH-FREQUENCY RAIL LINE CONNECTING CITIES THROUGHOUT SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO SHOULD BE A PRIORITY FOR BOTH FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS IN ORDER TO ADDRESS VEHICLE CONGESTION ON HIGHWAYS AND PROMOTE A MORE SUSTAINABLE METHOD OF TRAVEL.

Connecting Southwestern Ontario cities through a fast and efficient rail service has been an ongoing debate at Provincial and Federal levels of government for decades. Funds being directed to the expansion of highways could be better used towards improving a dedicated passenger rail system. Opponents of high speed rail service point to a lack of ridership to support the initial expense, but estimates project that the population of Ontario will grow to 22.1 million by the year 2051.³⁷ Such an ambitious project would not be about building for the “now” population, but in preparation for the future population boom.

The climate crisis requires immediate action to reduce vehicle pollution in order to protect the environment for generations to come. By creating infrastructure which will support high speed electric trains, people will have a real alternative to personal vehicle use. This will reduce travel times throughout Southwestern Ontario, while helping to eliminate the congestion and pollution caused by cars. As the only G7 country without a high speed rail network, Canada must build for the future. Students ask that all levels of government begin implementing environmentally responsible alternatives to cars and trucks and building for a future all Ontarians can be excited about.

The current VIA passenger system is unappealing to many students for a variety of reasons: it is expensive, the travel duration is similar to that of driving, and only about half of trains operate on time.³⁸ One of the largest contributing factors in VIA's unreliability is the fact that they only own about 3% of the tracks that it runs on; the rest are owned by the Canadian National railway, meaning that freight trains take priority over passenger service on those sections of line.³⁹ Until passenger trains have separate

36 Inter-community transit partner information and routes can be found here: <http://ride-sct.ca/>

37 Juha, Jonathan. 2024. “London-area population on pace for 880,000 by 2051,” *Londoner*, October 10, 2024.

38 VIA Rail Canada 2023 Annual Report, prepared by VIA Rail Corporate Communications (Montreal, QC, 2023) 21.

39 See the Service in the Corridor, and Access to infrastructure sections of “Via Rail's 2024 Annual Public Meeting Questions and answers,” August 7, 2024. https://corpo.viarail.ca/sites/default/files/media/pdf/APA-APM/2024_APM_Questions-and-Answers_EN.pdf



tracks designed with the capacity to withstand the rigours of high speed service, any improvements will be severely limited.

Until very recently, the Federal Government has focused on working towards a high frequency rail system that would add additional passenger trains to existing routes in southwestern Ontario but do little to improve travel time. However, at the end of summer 2024 the Ministry of Transportation closed a request for proposals to create a dedicated rail line between Toronto and Montreal, including options for train speeds up to 200 km/hr, and over 200 km/hr.⁴⁰ Should this come to pass and prove beneficial overall, the expansion of a route from Windsor to Toronto would be called for.

⁴⁰ High Frequency Rail Project Request for Proposals, prepared by Transport Canada (Ottawa, ON, 2023).



CONCLUSION

We know the recommendations outlined in this position paper will not happen overnight, but pedestrian safety and effective public transit are essential for students' well-being, mobility, and campus engagement. The recommendations presented here aim to address current gaps in pedestrian infrastructure, campus and community lighting, reliable transit service, and enhanced travel options for students fulfilling educational and professional obligations both locally and throughout Ontario. The University Students' Council (USC) is committed to advocating for these changes through continuous dialogue with Western University administration, the City of London, and regional transit authorities. The USC's VP University Affairs and VP External Affairs will seek out opportunities to bring these recommendations to the attention of Western Administration and relevant government bodies.

As we meet with these key decision makers, we plan to present our findings, outline the necessity of each recommendation, and initiate collaborative planning for implementation. By championing student perspectives and engaging with stakeholders, we aim to make significant strides toward a safer and more accessible environment for our campus community.





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