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—Wayne Hiebert, Citizen

**Nine blocks:** Outaouais buses wait on King Edward to begin homeward trips from Rideau bus mall

# CLOGGING KING EDWARD

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Citizen

## Residents fed up with rush-hour lineups of Outaouais buses

By Doug Yonson  
Citizen regional bureau

The line of noisy, smelly, idling buses forms as the afternoon rush hour starts.

Between 4:30 and 5:15 p.m., up to 20 Outaouais Transit buses will clog the curb lane of King Edward Avenue in Lowertown.

In lines stretching along nine blocks, the drivers are waiting to begin homeward trips from the nearby Rideau Street bus mall.

But fed-up residents want the buses to wait somewhere else, in a non-residential area, and back in Hull if necessary. They say the buses are loud and dirty, and their physical bulk is overwhelming.

"The buses are an intruder," says Angie Todesco, president of the King Edward Avenue Task Force. "They contribute to the overall horrific traffic conditions we have to live with."

"This area is almost entirely residential," adds Jeffrey Rice, a University of Ottawa student who lives in an apartment on King Edward. "No other residential area would be asked to put up with this stacking of buses."

The bus company sympathizes with the complainants, and is willing to clean up its act somewhat. By making sure drivers don't leave the garage early, and by moving some buses back to the Quebec side, operations manager Gilles Caron says that, at most, 10 buses will be lined up at any time.

In addition, drivers will be told to shut off the engines while idling in warmer weather. (The diesel engines are hard to restart in cold weather.) And the company is studying its route network this year. A change may reduce the use of King Edward.

This compromise is endorsed by

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Ottawa-Carleton transportation staff, who are involved because King Edward is a regional road. But it's not enough for residents. They want the buses moved, period.

Caron says that's impossible. To keep to schedule, buses must wait for short periods near their starting point. And Caron says the company can't afford to build a terminal near Ottawa's downtown core, especially with the Quebec government set to eliminate transit subsidies during the next four years.

Meanwhile, OC Transpo stacks its buses along Maisonneuve Boulevard in Hull each afternoon, as they wait to begin their express runs to suburbs. If Outaouais buses were evicted from King Edward, "the same thing could happen to OC Transpo in Hull," says Caron. "There has to be some give and take."

Lowertown residents are particularly galled because they say the Outaouais buses ignore parking and stopping bans along King Edward and Ottawa parking

officers look the other way.

Regional regulations allow far fewer than 10 buses to wait at a time, but the region wants to set the limit at 10.

"That is not an improvement," says Todesco. "It simply makes legal what is now illegal."

Tom Keeley, manager of Ottawa's parking control officers, says the King Edward area is adequately policed. He says officers visit several afternoons a week and issue \$50 tickets whenever possible.

He notes that drivers often move their buses when officers approach, adding that it's difficult to ticket many buses because they're packed so closely together their licence plate numbers aren't visible.

But Todesco is perplexed that few tickets are handed out "when the bus stacking is persistently and flagrantly occurring." And Caron says he's not aware of any tickets issued in the past few months, adding that fining Outaouais bus drivers wouldn't be appreciated. "That is not the way to solve this problem."

The region's transportation committee has postponed its review of the issue to allow the ward alderman, Marc Laviolette, to hold a public meeting.

Laviolette says the region's proposed compromise is "not bad, although not having the buses there at all is better."

But Laviolette, an OC Transpo commissioner, says he understands Outaouais Transit's concern about operating efficiency.

Todesco is unimpressed by such reasoning. "The region seems more concerned with systems and efficiencies than with maintaining residential neighborhoods."