***Submission to the Finance and Economic Development Committee***

***From: GottaGo! Campaign (Joan Kuyek DSW, presenter)***

***March 3, 2015***

Thank you for this opportunity to present to the Finance and Economic Development Committee.

**The GottaGo! request to FEDCO**

We ask that the City develop a policy and an implementation strategy during the 2015 budget period to ensure that public access to safe, clean, efficient toilets - accessible to people of all abilities - is an essential part of all corporate and departmental projects undertaken by the City, including future renewal, renovation and development plans.

This has implications for a number of specific FEDCO responsibilities:

* The Real Estate Partnerships and Development Office (REPDO) should ensure that sufficient and open public toilets are provided in the delivery of their programs and services.
* Information Technology Services should develop a map of publically available toilets in the City, with information about their location, hours/days of operation and accessibility, which can be downloaded as an app by residents and tourists alike.
* The Confederation Line must include public toilets at all stations; and – if this is not possible - at least at major interchanges where no other alternative exists – such as Bayview and Hurdman. Where the stations rely on other providers (like a shopping mall) there must be highly visible signage on the platforms, etc. indicating distance to the toilet, accessibility for the disabled, and other services like baby change tables.
* The 2015-2018 capital budget must include the planning for open, accessible, safe, clean public toilets as part of any future light rail projects such as Stage 2- LRT, and as part of the planning and implementation of extensions of bus rapid transit/O-train connectivity , as well as any new residential and commercial developments, including parks.

**Discussion and rationale**

Open, safe, clean, easy-to-find public toilets - accessible to people of all abilities - are an issue for everyone: for parents of small children, for seniors, for people with disabilities, for people with bowel and bladder disorders, for cyclists, pedestrians, and for tourists.

When a city chooses not to take responsibility for ensuring public toilets are available, the costs are great: people suffer in silence at home; there are lost business opportunities and tourism; people urinate and defecate in inappropriate places, and there are health costs in strained bladders, anxiety and limited mobility. A network of good public toilets is an essential part of a green, sustainable city and complete streets.

In England, professors Greed, Hanson and Bichard have dedicated several years to the study of public toilet availability and accessibility, concluding that public toilets are the missing link to increasing transit ridership[[1]](#footnote-1). Bichard uses two metaphors to discuss this argument. One is the “bladder leash,” which

constrains how long people can be away from home (and, therefore, how far they can get from home via their various modes of transportation) before they need to use a toilet. The second metaphor is the “transportation chain,” which is the link of trips any commuter takes in order to get from one place to another. For most transit users, the first link is a walk or drive from home to the transit station. From there, the chain can include bus, streetcar, rail, bicycle, automobile, and more walking before a day’s commute is complete. [[2]](#footnote-2)

Almost all capital cities in the world provide a network of public toilets: Paris, London, Oslo, Seoul, Canberra, Christchurch, Tokyo, Bejing. In the United States, although many subway toilets were closed after 9/11 because of terrorism fears, there are still open toilets in over 69 of the New York subway stations and Washington DC plans to install modern toilets at key stations in their new Silver Line. Australia has 17,000 public toilets and a national registry and map.

As an example of what can be done in terms of policy, the City of Melbourne has a five year plan (2008-2013) that assessed their public toilet situation[[3]](#footnote-3) and set out an implementation plan for the provision of a network of public toilets.

If these cities can do it, why can’t we?

Modern design and siting means that past concerns about safety and security can be minimized. Edmonton has a design that includes a glass front so that the stall doors are clearly visible from outside; Atlanta, Georgia has developed a design for their MARTA transit system that is hands free and vandal proof, at a very reasonable cost. We know that good lighting, facing onto a busy, well-lit street or platform, self-cleaning technologies and/or staffing go a long way to making these toilets safe.

The Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the standards that are set out its regulations, including the Ontario Building Code, the Built Environment Standard and Customer Service Standard, recognize the need for accessible washrooms in commercial enterprises, public buildings and food service businesses. Certainly there will be opportunities for the City to partner with private operations that meet these standards so that the toilet network is more extensive. These partnerships could include a small subsidy to the business in return for street signage indicating that there is an accessible toilet inside that is available to the public. Similar arrangements might be made with federal and provincial buildings downtown.

We are aware that there are already a number of public toilets in Ottawa mostly in parks and recreation centres. Wards 12 and 14 together have 37. However, 13 of these are “seasonal use only” and the others are “open programming hours”. They are not necessarily located in safe or easily accessible places and they can be hard to find. The best is City Hall, open 6am to 11pm daily. Finding ways to extend their hours, or to build a modern semi-automated unit into one wall of the bigger building might solve the problem.

The other issue is finding toilets when we need them. An interactive map similar to the maps in Seoul, London and Australia, would help tourists and residents alike. The UK has The Great British Public Toilet Map and even a map of toilets in their tube stations. Korea and Japan provide interactive maps; so does Australia.

We know that creating a network of public toilets is not without cost. Without adequate investment in design and maintenance, the toilets deteriorate and invite vandals and misuse. Toilets can cost anywhere from $60,000- $500,000 to build and can cost anywhere from $6000 to the equivalent of a labourer’s salary annually to maintain. More research into costs must be undertaken in development of the policy and implementation plan.

Building the toilets in the course of other renovations and new construction saves enormously on capital costs. There are opportunities to recoup at least some of the costs through charging a small fee and through advertising. Riders on rapid transit are already paying customers, so the toilets would only be available to them, not the general public. Research indicates that increased ridership on transit and increased business in areas where people could now extend their stay could offset initial costs. We do know that Paris used to charge for their toilets but stopped charging a few years ago.

**Who is Gotta Go!**

GottaGo! was organized in November 2013 to research, organize and lobby to address the need for a network of public toilets in Ottawa. GottaGo! is an entirely volunteer effort and we have been using our own resources and in-kind help from others to fund what we are doing.

The project has substantial public support. Public toilets are an issue for everyone: an aging population, families with children, tourists, pedestrians and transit users. People like the 7000 Crohns and Colitis sufferers in Ottawa, who have suffered great embarrassment or humiliation, or who have been held captive by their fear of an accident on public transit or at City events are now speaking up.

A poll conducted following a CTV News at Six item asked “Are there enough public toilets in downtown Ottawa?” Of the more than 1600 people who responded, over 88% said no. In September we submitted a 1000 signature petition to Council asking for toilets at the LRT stations. Our campaign has been endorsed by groups as diverse as the Ottawa Disability Coalition, the Alliance to End Homelessness, the Council on Aging, Ecology Ottawa and a number of community associations (a full list can be found on our website).

***For more information about this issue, visit our website at Ottawa.publictoilets.ca***

1. Bichard, J.-A., Hanson, J., & Greed, C. (2013). Access to the built environment/barriers, chains and missing links. University College London, London, England. At page 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In Washington, Kate. Before You Go. PSY online publications, vol 8, #1, 2014. <http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1134&context=mcnair> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutCouncil/PlansandPublications/strategies/Documents/PublicToiletPlan.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)