

# Future of Transit: The topic among candidates – Week 16

By **Content Team** - July 25, 2022 @ 10:58 am



*Do you have a question you would like to be asked of your candidates in the week's leading up to the election? Let us know at [newsroom@saultonline.com](mailto:newsroom@saultonline.com) or in the comment section!*

This is week 16 of our question-and-answer feature in which SaultOnline poses a question from the constituents to those running for community leadership on council.

Our team garners questions from the community, at times from specific members, and at other times from multiple constituents as posed over the last 48 months on our social media platforms and present them to those wanting to lead our community.

Currently, only those listed on [the City of Sault Ste. Marie website](#) as running for the respective positions as Mayor and Councillors are given these questions.

As always the question is put forward early in the week and an assigned deadline of Saturday at 5pm is given for responses to be submitted.

This week's question comes from social media:

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

Do the answers here match yours? Let us know in the comment section.

## **Mayoral Candidates –**

### **Matthew Shoemaker-**

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

Most people know I've opposed the moving of the bus terminal from the get-go. If it is going to be moved, the old Agawa Canyon station in the mall parking lot should be looked at. It is in roughly the same area as the current Dennis Street location, and shouldn't require a massive renovation to make it function as a bus terminal. There's also way more room in and around that building to move buses in-and-out safely, which is a problem at the current Dennis Street location.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

The routes were re-worked about 3 years ago to be more efficient, and that saved us substantial money. In fact, it saved us so much money, that we were able to reinstitute Sunday bus service which has been cut in the previous term. I think we should do a route optimization every 10 years to make sure the needs of our transit system reflect the changes in our growth as a city. I have and also will continue to support going to smaller busses where the capacity of the routes doesn't require 40 foot busses. Many of our recent bus purchases have been busses that are more than 10% smaller than our previous full-size buses.

### **Tobin Kern-**

Transit is an important issue for me, because it has the potential to be a real game-changer in reducing our community's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and tackling climate change, and in addressing issues of transportation inequities in our community.

In its current form, public transit is not a viable form of transportation. The central hub model embeds a lot of time-consuming, out-of-the-way travel, making it difficult to get to where you need to go in a timely fashion. I propose that we adopt a system like Guelph is pursuing, a grid system, in order to provide more efficient service. It builds in quicker,

more direct routes, so people can get to work, to their shopping, and access essential services in a timely manner. More than that, I think we need to adopt the strategy of fares reduction, that is so popular in Europe right now, to increase the uptake of transit use. A city bus is only an effective climate change solution if it means buses are operating at, or near full capacity, and people are leaving their cars at home. It is a huge net emissions creator when only a handful use it at a time, like a giant SUV rumbling around town.

A system that is widely used, with cheaper fares, also has the potential to generate more revenue. A bus with 35 people on it, who paid \$1, is generating more revenue than a bus with six people on it, who paid \$3.

There's also the issue of transportation equity. Right now, our transit system is set up to be a system of last resort for people who don't have cars. There's a reason that so few, or no members of council use public transit as their chosen method of transportation, in spite of their moral obligation to act as leaders in the fight against climate change. It's because the system is slow, ineffective, and almost impossible to use for a busy person. And this is the system that we've provided to our city's poor, disabled, and elderly, who do not drive, which likely acts as a significant road block to accessing more affordable grocery options, and to health services and other essential services they need to improve their lives. It's unconscionable.

If I'm elected mayor, I vow to use only active transit, and public transit when acting on city business, and challenge all of current council, and the future council to do the same. I think in doing this, it will show leadership on climate change, when leaders leave their cars at home as much as possible, and shows that we are serious about having equitable transportation options for all. I also hope that in light of these moral and ethical obligations, council will take up the call to create a more robust public transit service, that provides viable transportation options for all citizens, and act as champions of that system.

I also think that if we actively pursue a better transit system, that results in an increase in usage, and significantly reduces our transportation GHG emissions, we will get noticed by the provincial and federal governments; governments like to hitch their wagons to success stories. As such, I believe it will get our city greater access to funding for more efficient buses, potentially electric buses, which will further reduce our GHG transportation emissions for each person who uses it.

Like any worthwhile project, improvements in public transit will likely take some initial investment. But as I've outlined, I think such an investment will generate increased revenue, and address the serious issues of climate change and transportation equity. Quite simply, it will make our city better, in real, tangible ways.

## **Ozzie Grandinetti**

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

The bus terminal should stay in the same location it is now, this location is convenient for people using the transit system. It is a short walk to the Station Mall, the boardwalk and the GFL Memorial Gardens which makes it ideal for people to walk to greyhound games, events and shopping. If I was to pick a new location for the bus terminal, it would be the old ACR building located in the Station Mall parking lot as it is also very convenient for people. I would have to see the numbers and ask the difficult question "Do we need a new bus terminal or do we just upgrade the one we have now?" The most cost effective option would need to be further explored now that the relocation has been put on hold.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

Yes I would like to see the bus routes and the size of the busses changed. As noted on my webpage [www.ozzie4mayor.com](http://www.ozzie4mayor.com) I want to modernize the transit system and add smaller busses to the fleet and investigate options for ride sharing as other Cities have done in order to make their transit systems more efficient, cost effective and more convenient for the users. Many of the busses in the City are driving around in circles empty (Not that good for the environment is it). Just look at the route that goes through my neighbourhood (Nixon Road), there used to be one empty bus that travelled north on my street and now there are two empty busses that travel north and south. There is no need for a full size bus to be driving up and down my street all day long. We should have smaller busses or ride sharing options available to the residents in areas like mine where there are less users. We would be able to improve the service (reduce ride times), save our roads from the constant wear and tear that the large busses put on them and increase ridership.

We can accomplish all this without hiring expensive consultants, we have a lot of experienced drivers and city transit workers that are knowledgeable about the ridership rates and routes that would work best for our City, create efficiencies and improve service for those using the transit on a regular basis.

**Donna Hilsinger – No Response Submitted**

## **Ward 1 –**

**William McPhee-**

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

I think that where the bus terminal is now is a good spot. I think that there was a lot of benefit to putting the transfer spot in at Sault College.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

I believe that there could be more done to make the bus system better overall, which might include changing routes, or using different sized buses. I think the other thing we should look into is putting signs at stops where there is a shelter to inform people what busses

stop there. I think there should also be route maps put in the shelters at the Sault College transfer. This would help people who are new to the city or new to taking the bus.

## **Sandra Hollingsworth – No Response Submitted**

### **Brent Derochie –**

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

When making decisions that have already had some consideration, it is important to review the work that has been done-to-date. I understand that there has been research done that indicated the cost effectiveness of moving the terminal to the 111 Huron St site.

In speaking with the residents, there are strong community opinions to leaving it where it is. The current location creates an ease of access to those using the service. It is close to the GFL Memorial Gardens, the Station Mall, practitioner's offices (ie, dental, optometry, physiotherapy, etc) and local businesses.

On July 11, 2022, Dan Gray posted a report on SaultOnline indicating that council decided to cancel the relocation of the terminal at this time, to continue to have it currently operate on Dennis St and to send the issue back to City Planners for further consideration. The plans to move it have been cancelled based on staff recommendations that referenced the bids for the renovations being higher than expected.

I am glad to see Council task City Planners to revisit the issue. We need to look at downtown core options of the current location or some other location that meets the needs of people and is cost effective. Citizens have voiced opinions and concerns, so transparency for the decision will be critical.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

Meeting the needs of our citizens and users of the services is always the goal. If there are efficiencies to be had, I would certainly entertain a review. City planners have responsibilities to gather and analyze data, then provide recommendations for changes, which is critical in making sound decisions. Before making any changes, we need to ask what route changes are needed, why they are needed and what is the impact of changing them. Changing the sizes and types of buses depends on the usage of the vehicles, the maintenance cost and whether accessibility requirements are met. There is a growing need for accessibility accommodations and achieving standards; thus it would be imperative to ensure that any city purchases or contracts reach beyond minimum standards. Again, I look to City planners to provide some analysis about options, pro's and con's for changing bus sizes and recommendations based on that information.

## **Ward 2 –**

**Lisa Vezeau-Allen** – No Response Submitted

**Luke Dufour** – No Response Submitted

## **Ward 3 –**

**Luis Moreno** – No Response Submitted

**Kurtis McDermid** – No response submitted

**Angela Caputo** – No response submitted

## **Ward 4 –**

**David Celetti** –

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

Leave it right where it is...Not a good time to spend taxpayers dollars on something we already have.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

Yes, bus routes must be looked at and where needed changed to suite ridership....as it stands the good folks I talked to say it needs to be looked at and adjusted as needed.

**Stephan Kinach-**

- Before I begin my answers, I would like to provide some information about Sault Ste Marie Transit
- 1.9 million is the highest ever ridership in a one-year period. The standard fare is \$3.05
- Total Budget for SST in 2021 was around \$7 million and transit fares recouped only around 50% of that
- The 1st fully electric bus is coming soon
- There are currently 11 Parabuses in the fleet
- The new terminal was put on hold because the tender came in at around \$2 million over budget. So, the city needs to re-draft the grant proposal so that the Federal and Provincial Government can cover roughly 73% of the costs

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

I personally do not believe we need to relocate. The bus terminal is in the heart of downtown. Moving it out of the downtown core would be a huge mistake! A successful transit system is one that lets you walk from the station/stop to where you need to go. At the current location you have GFL Memorial Gardens across the street, Station Mall one city block away, and the boardwalk 2 blocks away. If we move the terminal further away from the heart of the city it destroys the whole integrity of the transit system.

Rather than relocating, I would like to see expansions and upgrades at the current location. While it is on pause, it is a great time to reconsider and redesign the plan before more money is spent.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

The transit system's main customers are students from the university and college, immigrants/ new to Sault Ste Marie residents, and seniors/ disabled residents (100% Parabus clients).

I think two strategies to help utilize our bus system more efficiently would be: Firstly, I would like to see our city try to increase ridership. An easy niche group to target would be Greyhound fans. Take the bus downtown, eat at some of our great restaurants in the area, have some drinks in the bars and pubs, then catch the bus home after the game. All worry free and skip the stress of finding a parking spot and the traffic jam exiting that parking lot. The same concept can be applied to concerts and festivals. Additionally, I would like to make Queen St from Dennis St to East St along a weekend pedestrian zone Friday to Sunday night and encourage residents to take transit to get there. This targets the demographics which are not currently using the bus and, more importantly, provides a reason for them to try the bus and leave their cars at home.

To go even further to promote transit system use, I would love to make the transit system free to use in Sault Ste. Marie! And I would support a flat \$2 parking fee per day in all city parking lots to offset the cost.

Secondly, Saultites are getting older which is shifting the kinds of services taxpayers require from transit. A lot of the people who never used transit before will start to rely on Parabus services for appointments and family events.

We need to start planning and expanding the fleet of Parabuses, training drivers now before it's too late. The Parabus is already quite difficult to book (1-2 weeks ahead) and good luck trying to book a Parabus same day on Saturday and Sunday when they are closed and don't take bookings.

Parabus is a premium service to our citizens, so it should be switched from fare based to a monthly pass/ subscription to help offset the cost of the new buses and employees.

With that in mind the monthly rate should be in the range of 2 wheelchair accessible taxi rides a month (\$30-60/ride) to 2 non-emergency ambulance transport services \$45/call. We

should also provide a free pass for those registered with the current disability or wage assistance programs through the Federal and Provincial Governments.

If you like my perspective, please share my ideas with your family, friends and colleagues. Please consider voting for Stephan Kinach Ward 4. If you would like to reach out to me personally my email is [kinachward4@gmail.com](mailto:kinachward4@gmail.com).

**Merek McLeod** – No response submitted

**Marchy Bruni** – No response submitted.

## **Ward 5 –**

**Corey Gardi** –

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

Personally, as long as the bus terminal is in close proximity to downtown or within the downtown proper, I would be satisfied with that. For efficiency sake, I was supportive with the relocation mentioned. That said, due to costs increasing due to all of the challenges with inflation/supply chain/labour shortage etc., we will have to wait and see what if any further funds may be provided by the Federal Government.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

A few years ago there was a re-evaluation of our routes and a formal optimization was undertaken. Subsequent to even this effort, a few adjustments were made. I can attest that city staff were open to listening to feedback I received from constituents in the first year or so after being elected, and implemented some further changes to make routes out of the west end more optimal for riders. Continued improvement is necessary.

In terms of our fleet of buses, I'd support the use of smaller ones for those routes that aren't as busy, though further on demand service might be the way to address this. I think we have to be careful though, with more and more people moving to the Sault, students included, I see many of our routes getting busier, and we must be prepared for that.

We also need to transition to the most efficient and climate friendly buses as soon as it is feasible to do so, I will be advocating for this and obviously supporting any efforts that relate to the electrification of our fleet.

All in all, public transportation will be increasingly important in the coming years and we have to invest wisely to balance demand, while transitioning to a climate friendly fleet.

**Matt Scott-**



*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

I believe the best place for the downtown bus terminal, if we must have one, would be closer to the main downtown core. Two places that I was in favour of when the relocation originally came up were the old ACR building in the Station Mall parking lot and to keep the terminal in its original location. Moving it from the main downtown service area, especially given all of the issues with relocation so far, just doesn't make sense to me.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

I would absolutely love for our transit to be more efficient. Reducing bus sizes to more properly accommodate the ridership, routes that are more efficient and flexible based on data we collect, and I'd like to see the on demand bussing that we piloted get rolled out to other times. There is a lot to be desired for public transit in Sault Ste. Marie and it's something we should take a serious focus on.

### **Martin Poirier –**

*1/ With the downtown bus terminal relocation put on hold. Where do you believe the best place for a new terminal would be?*

I do not have a strong opinion on the location of the new terminal, but many clearly do.

In the in-person survey realized by Tulloch Engineering, out of the approximately 80 person interviewed, 16% said that it would create hardship or that it would be terrible, and a further 15% said it would impact them somewhat, 18% a little. Those are high figures.

Since the tenders came in too high and were rejected, I would certainly advocate we look again into all options on the table, including renovating the existing building. Yes, the City has already spent \$63,512 on the relocation when we factor in the ICIF funds, but that is a sunk cost.

Reading through the Asset Management Facility Condition Assessment of the 160 Queen Street East – the existing terminal – it is hard to arrive at the conclusion that the terminal needs relocation because of the building condition. That building, built in 1983, was deemed in fair condition, with an urgent need for a roof change, and some minor repairs (the report can be found on Council Agenda, June 14, 2021, page 186 of 392;

[https://saultstemarie.ca/Cityweb/media/City-Clerk/Council-Agendas/2021/2021\\_06\\_14\\_Merged\\_Agenda.pdf?ext=.pdf](https://saultstemarie.ca/Cityweb/media/City-Clerk/Council-Agendas/2021/2021_06_14_Merged_Agenda.pdf?ext=.pdf)). The important part is that the foundations and superstructure were found to be in good condition, with an estimated remaining lifetime of 70 years for these. Changing a roof and an HVAC system after 40 years on a building is normal.

Yes there are concerns of accessibility, security, HVAC repairs, and other renovations, but I'd be curious to compare what we can realize with that building with the same amount of money that is required to move the terminal.

As for the \$66,000/year in savings in fuel and manhour costs related to the change in location, I did not find a satisfactory rationale to support this claim. The argument I understood from the report is that the buses would be already at the terminal, so there would be no need to bring them back to the garage, but then elsewhere it is said that to reduce the impact of the relocation on users, some routes would need to be changed so that they pass by the Dennis Street location prior to coming to the terminal. It is thus hard to see where the saving is.

In the end, I find the location itself eccentric. There is not much to do around that terminal for most users, and it is not a destination for most. Furthermore, it would be hard to get out of there by foot as users would be dropped off deep in the lot, with only one exit on the North East, with a requirement to cross the staff parking to get out. Humans being humans, I think we should expect problems with people crossing the drop off zone illegally, and ending up crossing the Huron/Bay intersection in a disorderly manner, exactly where cars end up in the snowbank when ice forms in winter.

*2/ Would you like to see the routes, sizes/types of busses changed to be more efficient?*

A route optimization study was done in 2018. Changing of routes for them to be more efficient requires specialized work that go beyond my knowledge/knowhow. I would certainly support that we continue to do those study in the future.

**Dave Mornix – No response submitted.**

The Bi-Weekly scorecard which would normally tally the ongoing responses received and would typically appear in this section has been discontinued. However, an overall score will be added to a summary write-up our team will do on each candidate based on responses received near the end of the Q&A sessions in late September.

Do you have a question you would like to be asked of your candidates in the weeks leading up to the election?

Let SaultOnline know and our staff will do their best to get answers for not just you, but the community as a whole.

Thank you for choosing us as your source of news in Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area.

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