

## **Ottawa's Transportation Chair Pushes for a Sustainable and Accessible Transit Future**

Ottawa's plan to electrify its transit system has rolled out much more slowly than anticipated, and City Councilor Tim Tierney warns that delays in procurement, combined with an aging diesel fleet, are jeopardizing the city's environmental goals and public transit reliability.

Globally, the adoption of electric buses is increasing. As of 2023, there were approximately 635,000 electric buses in use worldwide, with the majority operating in China, according to [Clean Energy Canada](#). However, in Canada, progress has been slower, with electric vehicles accounting for just 10 per cent of the country's vehicles, as reported by [Canada Energy Regulator](#). Ottawa falls behind, with only four active electric buses on its roads.

“We were actually supposed to have a total of 90 buses on the road in the City of Ottawa, now electrified; there’s only four,” Tierney told a room of reporters. “We did get the commitment from former Environment Minister McKenna with the federal government that actually helped fund a lot of the suites, but we’re just not getting those buses in at this time.”

Tierney said the situation is a “massive issue,” noting that OC Transpo’s aging fleet is further compounding the problem. “Many of our diesel buses are 16, 17, or even 18 years old,” he said.

Diesel buses, Tierney said, are not just outdated—they are also environmentally and socially problematic. “Diesel buses spew a lot of emissions. They’re very loud and replacing them with electric buses would be a massive step forward for the environment.”

In Canada, diesel-powered city buses and other commercial vehicles contribute to 37 per cent of transportation-related emissions, according to [Clean Energy Canada](#). Diesel exhaust has been linked to health issues, including respiratory problems, headaches, and nausea, as well as environmental harms like air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#).

“So now we have a bigger challenge,” Tierney continued. We're trying to meet those target goals and reduce GHGs, but we're running into the problem where we might not actually have a bus to be able to deliver people. So certainly, we want to see our electric bus fleet roll out quicker.”

But the city is taking small steps to electrify other units of city vehicles, “I think we’re proceeding well. I think we’re realistic at the same time. The snow fleet, we have 800 vehicles in the city, from sidewalk plows to snowplows to graders,” said Tierney. “It’d be great to say, ‘Let’s Go Electric,’ but we’ve seen the failures in other areas that have tried it. Battery Life doesn’t last.

You're talking about very heavy stuff when it comes to light duty, like blowers for parks, we're going electric.”

Another opportunity for sustainable transit presents itself as the city strives for environmental caution. Tierney said that hydrogen powered vehicles are on the rise, “We're making a big commitment, but we're realistic, and now we're looking at hydrogen as a future of heavy vehicles in the city that again, emits nothing but water, and Canada is actually a leader in hydrogen production, and you're going to hear a lot about this over the next years.”