
AFFIDAVIT OF SARAH MEAGHAN WRIGHT GILBERT

I, SARAH MEAGHAN WRIGHT GILBERT, of the City of Ottawa in the Province of Ontario, AFFIRM:

1. I am a Citizen Transit Commissioner and have been closely following the Ottawa Light Rail Transit Public Inquiry (the “OLRT Inquiry”). As such, I have personal knowledge of the matters to which I hereinafter depose except where I have stated my evidence to be on information and belief, in which case I have indicated the source of my information and my belief in its truth.
2. I was appointed to the Transit Commission as a Citizen Commissioner on January 30, 2019. Attached hereto as **Exhibit “A”** to my Affidavit is a true copy of the relevant excerpts of the Minutes of the January 30, 2019 City Council Meeting.
3. I signed my Declaration of office on February 6, 2019. For ten years prior to that, I had used public transit daily to go from my home in Orleans to my job as a federal public servant in downtown Ottawa and later at Tunney’s Pasture. Attached hereto as **Exhibit “B”** to my Affidavit is a true copy of my Declaration of Office dated February 6, 2019.
4. I understood that Citizen Commissioners were appointed to provide a transit user’s perspective while providing oversight and direction to OC Transpo. I have not only brought my perspective as a daily transit user, but also as a stakeholder engagement and communications professional.
5. On June 30, 2022, Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson gave evidence before the OLRT Inquiry in which he impugned my professionalism and made false allegations against me. During his testimony in response to Commission Counsel John Adair’s questions regarding a WhatsApp discussion pertaining to me, Mr. Watson stated:

“I can tell you – I can put that in the context where on numerous occasions when this particular commissioner sent out tweets with false information that caused tremendous grief in the community and a number of personal attacks on the integrity of Mr. Manconi and members of his staff.. she was sending out completely false information about a stalled train that would cause people to panic....”

Attached hereto as **Exhibit “C”** to my Affidavit is a true copy of pages 193 to 194 of the OLRT Inquiry Hearing Transcript of Mr. Watson’s testimony dated June 30, 2022.

6. I have reviewed every tweet, retweet, quote tweet and reply tweet I sent on Twitter between the dates of September 14, 2019 (public launch of the LRT Line 1) and October 26, 2019 (date of WhatsApp messages referred to in paragraph 5, above) and can confirm that none of my tweets were personal attacks on the integrity of Mr. Manconi or members of his staff. I was critical of OC Transpo as an organization and public institution, specifically with respect to their customer communications, but my criticisms never rose to the level of personal attacks.
7. I can also confirm that I never intentionally sent out false information.
8. During that period of time, OC Transpo was not communicating in a timely or effective way with its customers about the stopped trains and resulting delays. Due to the communications void from OC Transpo and the City of Ottawa, members of the public were sharing their observations with one another on social media in order to assist other passengers. I was inundated with tweets directed at me, informing me of delays, stalled trains, dangerous station conditions (such as slippery floors) and general customer dissatisfaction.
9. I attempted to help my fellow transit riders by re-tweeting as many of these tweets as I could. I can recall a handful of occasions when a tweet sent to me turned out to be inaccurate or out of date, such as a previously stalled train no longer being on the tracks. On those few occasions when inaccuracies were brought to my attention, I either put out a clarification or deleted the tweet.
10. I have reviewed the transcript of Mr. Watson’s WhatsApp chats which was filed as an exhibit before the OLRT Inquiry. On October 25, 2019, Mr. Watson himself expressed frustration to Mr. Manconi regarding the shortcomings in OC Transpo’s communication with its customers during the same period of time. Attached hereto as **Exhibit “D”** to my Affidavit is a true copy of p. 24 of OLRT Inquiry Exhibit 206, “Whats App Chat Log 16 July 2019 to 31 December 2019.”
11. In his questioning of Mr. Watson on June 30, 2022, Commission Counsel John Adair put to him a portion of a WhatsApp message from Mr. Manconi wherein he referenced an interview I had given on local radio station, CFRA:

“Why isn’t someone pulling that public commissioner off the air. She is live in CFRA. A call in asking people to complain about OC Transpo? She is destroying

us with misinformation. Destroying the brand and accusing us of distorting facts. Also talking about congestion. How is this appropriate or fair?"

Attached hereto as **Exhibit "E"** to my Affidavit is a true copy of page 192 of the OLRT Inquiry Hearing Transcript of Mr. Watson's testimony dated June 30, 2022.

12. The interview Mr. Manconi was referring to in his WhatsApp message took place on October 26, 2019. A recording of the interview is available at https://omny.fm/shows/580-cfra/hour-2-of-the-goods-for-october-26-2019?in_playlist=580-cfra!the-goods-with-dahlia-kurtz (interview starts at 13:55)
13. Listeners were invited to call in, or post on the station's social media channels, and share their biggest concerns with respect to the LRT, with the stated goal of providing me with information that I could share with OC Transpo at the next Transit Commission meeting. I have relistened to the audio of that interview multiple times in the course of preparing this Affidavit. To my knowledge, at no time during that interview did I offer misinformation, nor did I accuse OC Transpo of distorting facts. I did talk about my experiences as a daily transit user.
14. During the period of time between September 14, 2019 and October 5, 2019, the first three weeks of LRT service when parallel bus service was still in place, I received an unsolicited phone call on my personal cell phone from Mr. Manconi while I was packing up my things to leave my office for the day. In the course of that call, Mr. Manconi stated the following (paraphrased unless indicated with quotation marks):
 - (i) That my criticism of the public transit system was causing riders to lose faith in the system;
 - (ii) That OC Transpo employees were suffering from low morale as a result of my criticism and felt that I was "not on their side."
 - (iii) Mr. Manconi compared the situation to an Apple Inc. board member being critical of the new iPhone, causing the stock to tank;
 - (iv) Mr. Manconi stated that if I had issues while using the LRT, I should call him directly and not post on social media;
 - (v) Mr. Manconi also directly asked me to stop tweeting criticisms of OC Transpo communications or Line 1 of the LRT.

15. I found this call to be unnerving and inappropriate. Furthermore, while Mr. Manconi clearly had many issues with my use of social media to fill the communications void, at no time did he express to me that he felt I was spreading misinformation. Mr. Manconi confirmed that this call took place in an interview he gave the Ottawa Citizen which was published on February 15, 2020. Attached hereto as **Exhibit "F"** to my Affidavit is a true copy of the Ottawa Citizen article dated February 15, 2020.

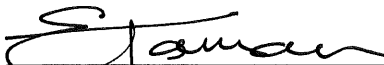
16. In my review of the evidence proffered at the OLRT Inquiry I have learned of new ways in which Mr. Watson and others discussed ways to silence me and even possibly seek my removal as a Citizen Commissioner.

17. While Mr. Watson and others were not successful in having me removed from my duly appointed position, the WhatsApp messages and Mr. Watson's *viva voce* evidence before the OLRT Inquiry show that they have instead attempted to discredit me and cause me reputational harm by wrongly claiming that I spread false information and engaged in personal attacks.

18. I make this Affidavit for the purposes of clarifying the record before the OLRT Inquiry and for no improper purpose.

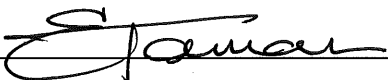
AFFIRMED before me remotely in accordance with O. Reg 431/20 by videoconference between Ottawa, ON (commissioner) and Antoine-Labelle, QC (affiant) this 7th day of July, 2022.)
)
)
)
)
)
)




 A Commissioner for taking affidavits, etc
 Emilie Taman
 LSO # 520490

SARAH MEAGHAN WRIGHT GILBERT

This is **Exhibit "A"** referred to
in the Affidavit of **SARAH WRIGHT GILBERT**,
affirmed before me this 7th day of July, 2022.


A Commissioner, etc.



OTTAWA CITY COUNCIL

Wednesday, 30 January 2019

10 am

Andrew Haydon Hall, 110 Laurier Avenue W.

MINUTES 4

The Council of the City of Ottawa met at Andrew S. Haydon Hall, 110 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, on Wednesday, 30 January 2019 beginning at 10:00 a.m.

The Mayor, Jim Watson, presided and led Council in a moment of reflection.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

The national anthem was performed by Pei Pilgrim.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/CEREMONIAL ACTIVITIES

RECOGNITION - MAYOR'S CITY BUILDER AWARD

Mayor Watson presented the Mayor's City Builder Award to Greg Thurlow. Mr. Thurlow has been a member of the Osgoode Village Community Association for seven years, including two years as president, and a member of the Osgoode Ward Business Association. Mr. Thurlow worked with local churches to help refugees, seniors and others in need, and continues to motivate residents to be more involved in community events. He volunteered at the Osgoode Medieval Festival, the annual Bethlehem Live church production, and as Santa Clause and the Easter Bunny at the Osgoode Care Centre where he also helped upgrade the lounge. He is Head Usher at the Trinity Bible Church where he produced and directed various dramas

3. [APPOINTMENTS TO THE OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD](#)

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That, further to deliberations of the Selection Panel, Council approve the following appointments to the Ottawa Public Library Board, all terms to be effective upon Council approval, for the 2018-2022 Term of Council:

Steven Begg

Mary-Rose Brown

Kathy Fisher

Allan Higdon

Harvey Allan Slack

CARRIED

4. [APPOINTMENTS TO THE TRANSIT COMMISSION](#)

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That, further to deliberations of the Selection Panel, Council approve:

- 1. The following appointments to the Transit Commission, all terms to be effective upon Council approval, for the 2018-2022 Term of Council:**

Anthony Carricato

Michael Olsen

Leah Williams

Sarah Wright-Gilbert

- 2. The following unranked pool of reserve members from which the Selection Panel may recommend appointments should a vacancy arise during the 2018-2022 Term of Council:**

André Bergeron

Brian Innes

John Marshall

Caterina Ositashvili

MOTION NO 4/3

Moved by Councillor S. Menard
Seconded by Councillor J. Leiper

That the appointment of Michael Olsen be referred back to the Selection Panel.

The Motion LOST on a division of 7 YEAS and 16 NAYS as follows

YEAS Councillors J. Leiper, T. Kavanagh, S. Menard, M. Fleury, D. Deans,
(7): J. Cloutier, C. McKenney

NAYS Councillors G. Darouze, S. Blais, J. Harder, A. Hubley,
(16): R. Brockington, T. Tierney, J. Sudds, C.A. Meehan, M. Luloff,
L. Dudas, K. Egli, E. El-Chantiry, G. Gower, R. Chiarelli, S. Moffatt,
Mayor J. Watson

MOTION NO 4/4

Moved by Councillor J. Harder
Seconded by Councillor A. Hubley

That the question be now put on the report recommendations.

CARRIED on a division of 16 YEAS and 7 NAYS as follows

YEAS Councillors G. Darouze, S. Blais, J. Harder, A. Hubley, T. Tierney,
(16): J. Sudds, C.A. Meehan, M. Luloff, L. Dudas, K. Egli, E. El-Chantiry,
G. Gower, J. Cloutier, R. Chiarelli, S. Moffatt, Mayor J. Watson

NAYS Councillors R. Brockington, J. Leiper, T. Kavanagh, S. Menard,
(7): M. Fleury, D. Deans, C. McKenney

The report recommendations were put to Council and divided for voting purposes:

That, further to deliberations of the Selection Panel, Council approve:

- 1. The following appointments to the Transit Commission, all terms to be effective upon Council approval, for the 2018-2022 Term of Council:**

Anthony Carricato

CARRIED

Michael Olsen

CARRIED, with Councillors R. Brockington, D. Deans, T. Kavanagh,
J. Leiper, M. Fleury, C. McKenney and S. Menard dissenting.

Leah Williams

CARRIED

Sarah Wright-Gilbert

CARRIED

- 2. The following unranked pool of reserve members from which the Selection Panel may recommend appointments should a vacancy arise during the 2018-2022 Term of Council:**

André Bergeron

Brian Innes

John Marshall

Caterina Ositashvili

CARRIED

This is **Exhibit "B"** referred to
in the Affidavit of **SARAH WRIGHT GILBERT**,
affirmed before me this 7th day of July, 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Aman", written over a horizontal line.

A Commissioner, etc.

DECLARATION OF OFFICE

I, ~~Sarah Wright-Albert~~^{Albert}, having been appointed as a Member of the City of Ottawa Transit Commission

Do solemnly promise and declare that:

- 1. I will truly, faithfully and impartially exercise the responsibilities of this appointment to the best of my knowledge and ability.
2. I have not received and will not receive any payment, reward, or promise thereof, for the exercise of this appointment in a biased, corrupt or in any other improper manner.
3. I will disclose any pecuniary interest, direct or indirect, in accordance with the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act.

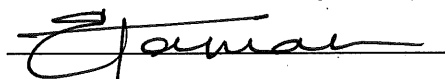
And I make this solemn promise and declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing that it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath.

Declared before me)
At the CITY OF OTTAWA)
ONTARIO)
On FEBRUARY 6, 2019)
20179 MDC

Signature of Declarant

M. B. O. J. -
Commissioner for taking Affidavits

This is **Exhibit "C"** referred to
in the Affidavit of **SARAH WRIGHT GILBERT**,
affirmed before me this 7th day of July, 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tanner", is written over a horizontal line.

A Commissioner, etc.



Public Hearing

Audience publique

Commissioner / Commissaire

The Honourable / L'honorable
C. William Hourigan

VOLUME 14

Held at :

Ian Scott Building
100 Thomas More Private
Second Floor Courtroom
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 1E3

Thursday, June 30, 2022

Tenue à:

Immeuble Ian Scott
100, Thomas More Private
Salle de cours au 2^e étage
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 1E3

Jeudi, le 30 juin 2022

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1 I think you're speaking to Serge Arpin:

2 "He and you and Allan and Kirk should meet with her
3 when Allan is back and say, if the attacks on staff
4 don't stop, she will be removed. Use 'attacks on staff'
5 as the issue." (As read).

6 Do you see that?

7 **THE HONOURABLE MAYOR JIM WATSON:** Yes.

8 **MR. JOHN ADAIR:** And what you were suggesting to the other
9 members of this WhatsApp group is that is Ms. Wright-Gilbert didn't stop criticizing OC
10 Transpo, she would be removed a Public Transit Commissioner, correct?

11 **THE HONOURABLE MAYOR JIM WATSON:** Well, my comment
12 was, on -- at 9:14-20 is:

13 "I, too, am furious with here. Best advice, turn off the
14 radio and shut out her nonsense." (As read).

15 **MR. JOHN ADAIR:** Yeah, sorry, could we just go back to the
16 question that I was asking you, please, because it's going to take a very, very long time
17 to get through this if we don't that. At 8:49 a.m., Mayor Jim Watson:

18 "He and you and Allan and Kirk should meet with her
19 when Allan is back and say, if the attacks on staff
20 don't stop, she will be removed. Use 'attacks on staff'
21 as the issue." (As read).

22 And what you were telling your staff to do is to tell the publicly-
23 appointed Transit Commissioner that if she didn't stop criticizing OC Transpo, she'd be
24 removed from the Commission.

25 **THE HONOURABLE MAYOR JIM WATSON:** I can tell you -- I
26 can put that in the context where on numerous occasions when this particular
27 commissioner sent out tweets with false information that caused tremendous grief in the
28 community and a number of personal attacks on the integrity of Mr. Manconi and

1 members of his staff. And we have a code of conduct that that kind of behaviour is not
2 acceptable. And the -- this commissioner, in particular, seemed to enjoy the limelight of
3 media and didn't quite understand her role as a member of the Board of
4 Commissioners.

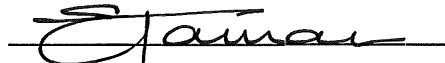
5 And I know I have them here somewhere, a number of examples
6 where Mr. Manconi, I believe, in his testimony, indicated the times that she was sending
7 out completely false information about a stalled train that would cause people to panic
8 because they were getting information; they thought it was legitimate because it came
9 from an OC Transpo Commission. And no one should put up with that kind of
10 nonsense. And quite frankly, I stand by the commitment to see what we could do if she
11 continued on that route.

12 I don't think that was followed because it would end up -- she would
13 end up becoming a martyr, you know, and woe is -- woe is she. But the fact is, you
14 don't send out false information that gives an extra workload and extra angst to our staff
15 and our passengers, who are our first priority. And also, attacks on staff should not be
16 tolerated, and if someone attacks one professionalism or their integrity, they should held
17 to account and either apologize or do the honourable thing and step down.

18 **MR. JOHN ADAIR:** And sir, you agree with me that one of the
19 reasons you have public members on the Transit Commission is, in part, it assists with
20 ensuring accountability, correct?

21 **THE HONOURABLE MAYOR JIM WATSON:** No, I was the one
22 that established -- it was to put individuals on who used the system so we could have a
23 user's perspective around the table. And for the first two terms of Council, we had
24 excellent Transit Commissioners. They acted responsibly and maturely. They provided
25 great feedback in terms of the regular bus or train rider, and it worked well. And then,
26 unfortunately, this individual applied, was selected, and immediately started, you know,
27 undermining the corporation that she was there to serve. And to send out false
28 information on Twitter does a disservice to those customers that these Citizen

This is **Exhibit "D"** referred to
in the Affidavit of **SARAH WRIGHT GILBERT**,
affirmed before me this 7th day of July, 2022.


A Commissioner, etc.

one vehicle that is indicating some issues . Spare is being requested from RTM.

[2019-10-24, 8:23:37 AM] John Manconi: Train was adjusted and has remained in service . Full fleet out in service

[2019-10-24, 8:25:27 AM] Serge Arpin: What does full fleet out mean - 13 trains?

[2019-10-24, 8:25:43 AM] John Manconi: Yes 13

[2019-10-24, 8:43:14 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: When will we send out more trains

[2019-10-24, 8:47:17 AM] Serge Arpin: We have asked John to update you on that this afternoon

[2019-10-24, 9:35:05 AM] John Manconi: Rush hour over no issues

[2019-10-24, 9:43:11 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Good to hear

[2019-10-24, 10:46:34 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Is there now a problem. I can't keep straights if it's an old tweet or current

[2019-10-24, 11:18:04 AM] John Manconi: No just a minor delay

[2019-10-25, 8:16:53 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: What is cause today ?

[2019-10-25, 8:20:53 AM] John Manconi: 5 min delay at Tunneys . Very busy we had door fault that was fixed on the spot. Platforms are clearing up train is loading up right now and another one is pulling in. Cfra is putting everything under a microscope.

[2019-10-25, 8:21:35 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Are both trains disabled

[2019-10-25, 8:21:55 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Yes or no

[2019-10-25, 8:23:20 AM] John Manconi: No. One train is there and will remain there stop listening to cfra!!! Tunneys is clear. The train was parked to clear the door fault which was done perfectly

[2019-10-25, 8:24:23 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Then why is this not I. Your tweets and you don't have a quicker response. And call Cfra and say that borjbeaina we're not

Disabled

[2019-10-25, 8:24:46 AM] John Manconi: I will never be able to beat twitter

[2019-10-25, 8:24:52 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: And why can't we fix door issues this weekend.

Working 24!hours to get it all done

[2019-10-25, 8:25:09 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: If you has someone monitoring it you could match twitter

[2019-10-25, 8:25:35 AM] John Manconi: I explained all that to you yesterday. Sil 2 software end of month. Other fixes 3 months

[2019-10-25, 8:27:14 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Why can't we speed it up

[2019-10-25, 8:28:16 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Why is twitter account still saying delays ?? It's been 20

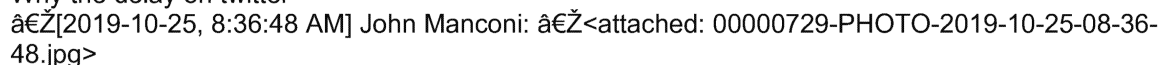
Minutes yet you tell me it was fixed in five minutes

[2019-10-25, 8:28:34 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Cfra is getting its info from your feed so hard to blame them when we still have old tweet up

[2019-10-25, 8:29:45 AM] John Manconi: Sil2 two certification. Nobody can deviated from the safety certification process. As for your other comments - ok.

[2019-10-25, 8:35:03 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Still no update on twitter. Are problems fixed completely?

Why the delay on twitter

[2019-10-25, 8:36:48 AM] John Manconi: 

[2019-10-25, 8:41:59 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: So this took 24 minutes to put up for a five minute delay

[2019-10-25, 8:44:01 AM] John Manconi: we had messages and twitter out immediately.

[2019-10-25, 8:46:38 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Look at the timelines. If problem was fixed in 5 minutes the. Why did he all clear meaaage take 24 minutes Also why do we not say it's a door issue as ippawd to language we are using

[2019-10-25, 8:47:14 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: ImmobkiEs train sounds like a system problem as opposed to customer holding doors

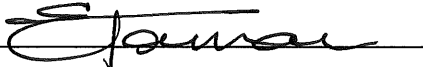
[2019-10-25, 8:47:21 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: Immobilized

[2019-10-25, 9:05:07 AM] Mayor Jim Watson: So citizen says 25 minute delay and you wrote to me and said if was 5 minute delay. Who's right ?

[2019-10-26, 8:43:50 AM] John Manconi: Why isn't someone pulling that public commissioner off the air. She is live in Cfra. A call in asking people to complain about oC transpo? She is destroying us with misinformation. Destroying the brand and accusing us of distorting facts. Also talking about congestion. How is this appropriate or fair?

[2019-10-26, 8:45:29 AM] Serge Arpin: We don't have the ability to just pull her off the air but we will

This is **Exhibit "E"** referred to
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affirmed before me this 7th day of July, 2022.


A Commissioner, etc.



Public Hearing

Audience publique

Commissioner / Commissaire

The Honourable / L'honorable
C. William Hourigan

VOLUME 14

Held at :

Ian Scott Building
100 Thomas More Private
Second Floor Courtroom
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 1E3

Thursday, June 30, 2022

Tenue à:

Immeuble Ian Scott
100, Thomas More Private
Salle de cours au 2^e étage
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 1E3

Jeudi, le 30 juin 2022

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1 might see it on the screen, and we can just leave it there for a minute, there's a couple
2 of references to your name. I'm going to direct your attention, sir, please, to the entry
3 October the 26th, so it's the bottom of the page, 8:43 a.m. If we could just scroll down a
4 little bit, that would be great. Yeah, so it's the second-last entry on the page.

5 Mr. Mayor, you'll see Mr. Manconi sends a message on October
6 the 26th at 8:43 a.m. He says:

7 "Why isn't something pulling that public
8 commissioner..."

9 Which is, I can tell you, Ms. Wright-Gilbert:

10 "...off the air. She is live in CFRA, a call-in asking
11 people to complain about OC Transpo. She is
12 destroying us with misinformation, destroying the
13 brand and accusing us of distorting facts." (As read).

14 And we know that you, and Mr. Hubley, and Mr. Kanellakos, and
15 Mr. Manconi would not ever distort the facts, correct?

16 **THE HONOURABLE MAYOR JIM WATSON:** Correct.

17 **MR. JOHN ADAIR:** Right, we know that because you've told us
18 that. And then he goes on to say:

19 "Also talking about congestion. How is this
20 appropriate or fair?" (As read).

21 Mr. Arpin responds:

22 "We don't have the ability to just pull her off the air but
23 we will talk with Allan..."

24 Which is a reference to Mr. Hubley:

25 "...when he returns about what, if anything can be
26 done." (As read).

27 And then you chime in on the 26th at 8:49 a.m, Mayor Jim Watson:

28 "Are he, and you, and Allan.."

This is **Exhibit "F"** referred to
in the Affidavit of **SARAH WRIGHT GILBERT**,
affirmed before me this 7th day of July, 2022.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Stana", written over a horizontal line.

A Commissioner, etc.

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Local News

'My only motivation is to improve public transit': Citizen transit commissioner Sarah Wright-Gilbert raises stink at city hall

Sarah Wright-Gilbert uses Twitter to update commuters on unfolding transit situations and to express dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Andrew Duffy

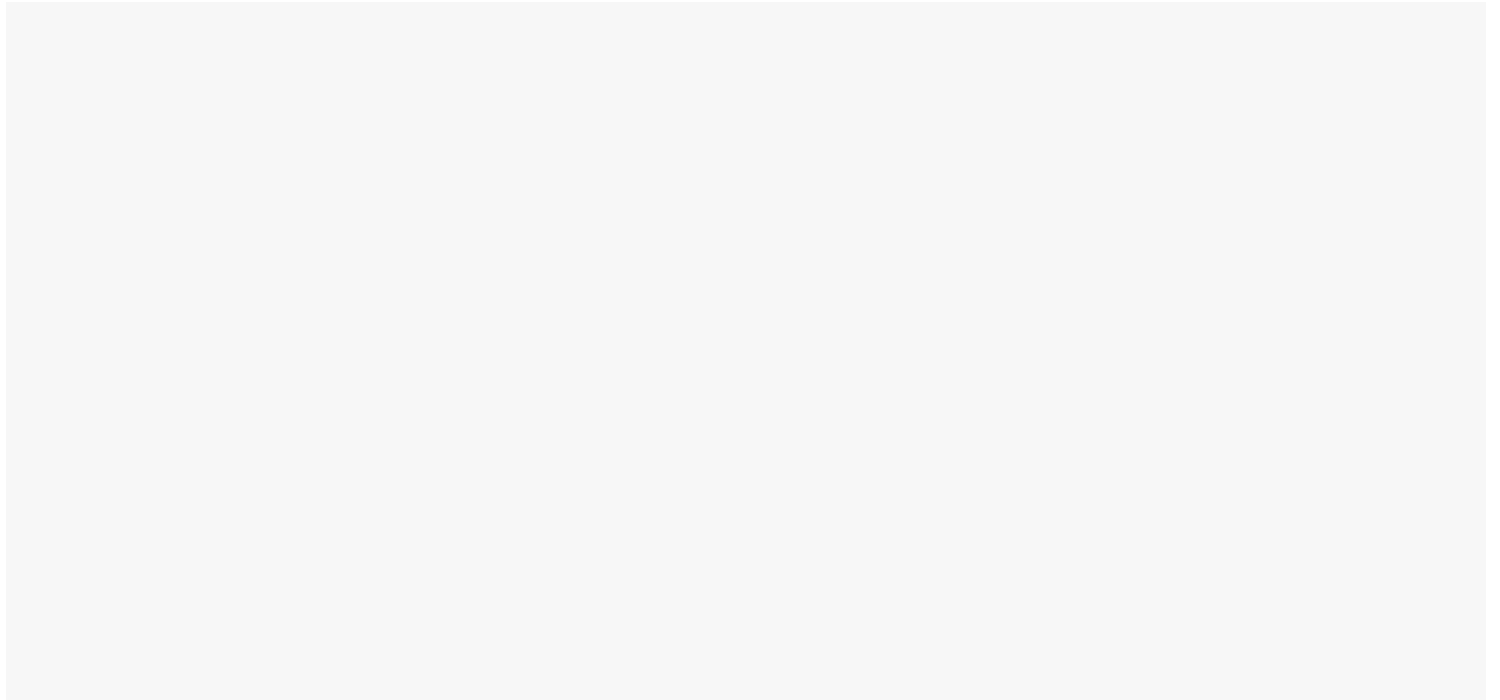
Feb 15, 2020 • February 18, 2020 • 6 minute read • 14 Comments



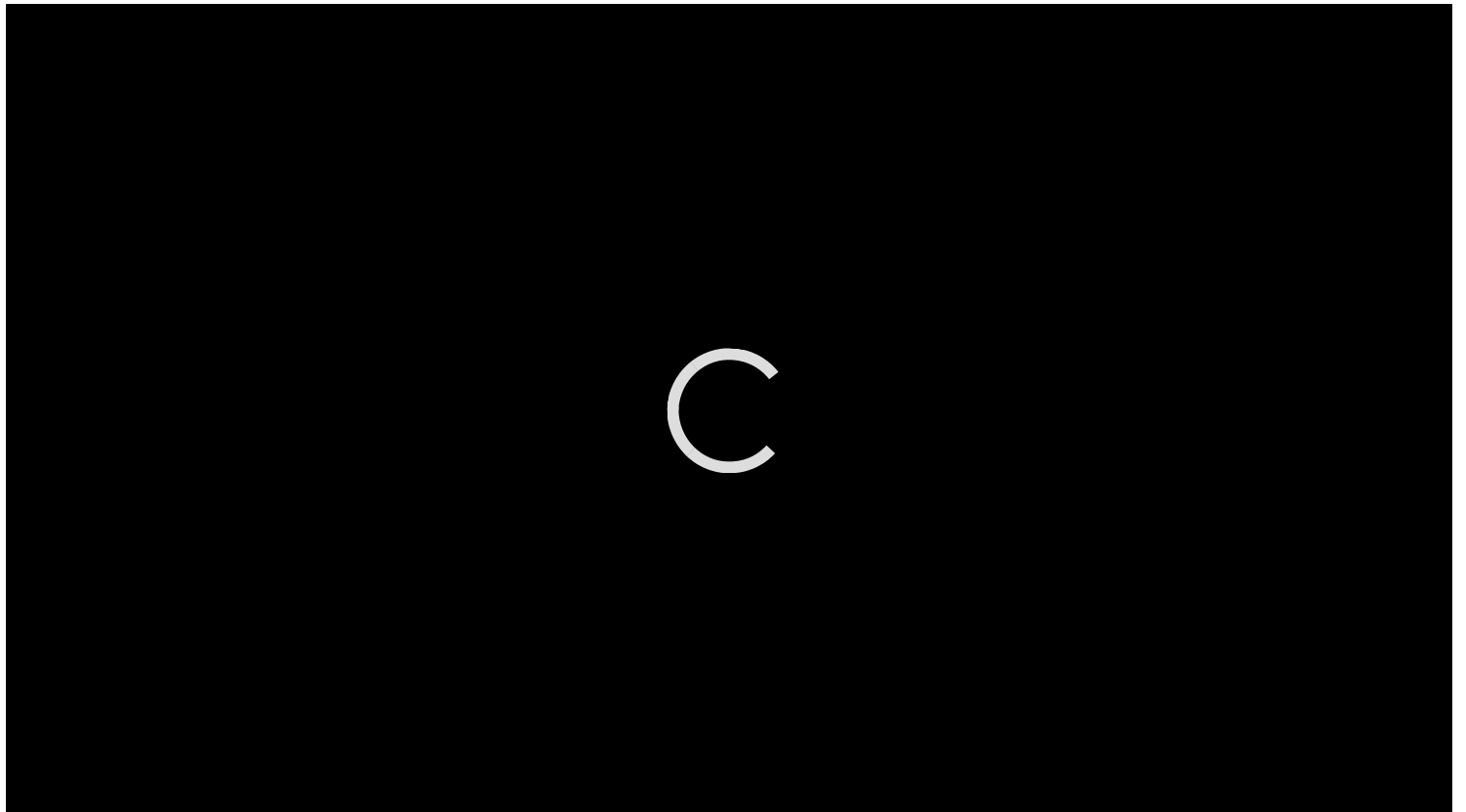
Sarah Wright-Gilbert, a citizen transit commissioner, outside the Tunney's Pasture Station. PHOTO BY WAYNE CUDDINGTON /POSTMEDIA

It's early Friday afternoon on a cold day in February and, once again, Sarah Wright-Gilbert's phone is blowing up.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW



One year into her volunteer role as a citizen transit commissioner, the 38-year-old has made herself an essential source of news and information about the city’s fickle light rail system.

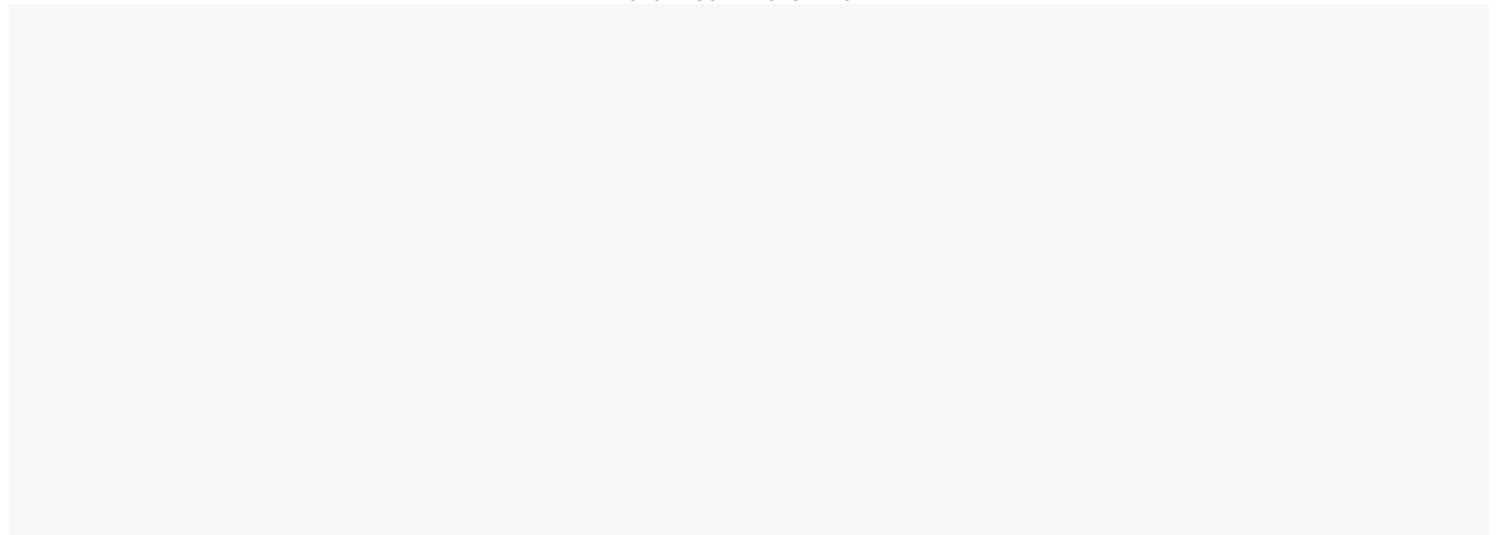


Today, the Confederation Line is having trouble navigating the winter weather: two trains have had to be towed. The episode follows a morning power outage that delayed some trains, and still more “switch issues.”

Wright-Gilbert has taken to her preferred medium, Twitter, to update commuters on the unfolding situation and to express her dissatisfaction with the status quo.

“It’s a snowy day (because Ottawa) and we yet again have switch issues and power failures — not to mention a complete lack of communication from OC Transpo. I’m so frustrated with our transit system.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW





Large crowds at Tunney's Pasture. PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /Postmedia

Wright-Gilbert has used her platform as a commissioner — and the power of social media — to insert herself into the heart of the discussion about this city's LRT. She has repeatedly called out OC Transpo management for failing to provide timely information or a reliable service.

To transit riders, she has become a folk hero of sorts: a fulcrum for their exasperated calls for action.

To OC Transpo officials and some of her fellow board members, however, she has become something of a problem: a wild card who refuses to play by the house rules.

"I will play by the rules, but the actual rules — not the ones that are just made up because I'm not in your club," Wright-Gilbert insists in an interview.

"They attempted to control me," she adds. "But I don't know who they thought they were dealing with...I really don't know what they were thinking. It just pissed me off more."

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

MORE ON THIS TOPIC



'A lot of frustrations': Montreal is hoping to avoid Ottawa's LRT mess

Last fall, Wright-Gilbert says, she received a phone call from OC Transpo general manager John Manconi after posting to Twitter about the problems she had encountered on her daily commute between her home in Orléans and her job in Tunney's Pasture. It was during the first three weeks of LRT service when parallel bus service was still in place.

"It was a 10-minute conversation," she recalls, "mostly one-sided, where he equated what I was doing with a board member from Apple speaking out and tanking the stock.

"I said, 'The difference is you're not the CEO, this isn't Apple, and I don't work for you.'"

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Invited to offer his version of their exchange, Manconi said it's his practice to call transit commissioners personally or to have a member of the senior management team contact them whenever he becomes aware they've raised concerns. "We have met with commissioner Wright-Gilbert to discuss with her comments and suggestions regarding the O-Train Line 1," he said.



Sarah Wright-Gilbert takes to Twitter during her regular commute from her home in Orléans to work at Tunneys Pasture. PHOTO BY WAYNE CUDDINGTON /jpg

The next attempts to bring Wright-Gilbert in line were entirely public.

In late October, transit commission chair Allan Hubley suggested in an open letter that Wright-Gilbert's request for an emergency meeting was "helping to destroy any remaining faith or confidence our ridership has in the system."

Weeks later, transit commission vice-chair Jean Cloutier denounced Wright-Gilbert's continued public criticism of the transit service. On Twitter, he called on her to work internally to fix the system rather

than issue what he called unproductive, unfair and inaccurate tweets. (Cloutier declined to be interviewed for this story.)

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“You seem to believe,” he told Wright-Gilbert on Twitter, “that Twitter and media appearances is (sic) a substitute for an actual phone call, an actual meeting, an actual discussion and an actual plan for improvement.”

Coun. Jeff Leiper leapt to Wright-Gilbert’s defence online, saying he valued her work: “She has demonstrated courage, empathy and persistence in a very challenging time that warrant celebration, not reproach,” he posted.

Jean Cloutier @AltaVistaWard18 · Nov 10, 2019



Replying to @AltaVistaWard18 and @TonyCarricato

You seem to believe that Twitter and media appearances is a substitute for an actual phone call, an actual meeting, an actual discussion and an actual action plan for improvement.

Jean Cloutier

@AltaVistaWard18 · [Follow](#)

Your unproductive tweets are not fair and are not accurate. Reflect on your objectives. Anytime you want to discuss, I would be happy to do so. We won’t do it on Twitter. The serious work has been going on for weeks and the problems are complex. Welcome to the club. 4 of 4.

1:15 PM · Nov 10, 2019



4 Reply Share

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Jean Cloutier @AltaVistaWard18 · Nov 10, 2019



Replying to @AltaVistaWard18 and @TonyCarricato

Your unproductive tweets are not fair and are not accurate. Reflect on your objectives. Anytime you want to discuss, I would be happy to do so. We won't do it on Twitter. The serious work has been going on for weeks and the problems are complex. Welcome to the club. 4 of 4.

Jeff Leiper (He/Him)

@JLeiper · Follow

Councillor, I value the work that the Commissioner has been doing. She's an appointed member without the security of a voter mandate, and doesn't deserve this. She has demonstrated courage, empathy and persistence in a very challenging time that warrants celebration not reproach.

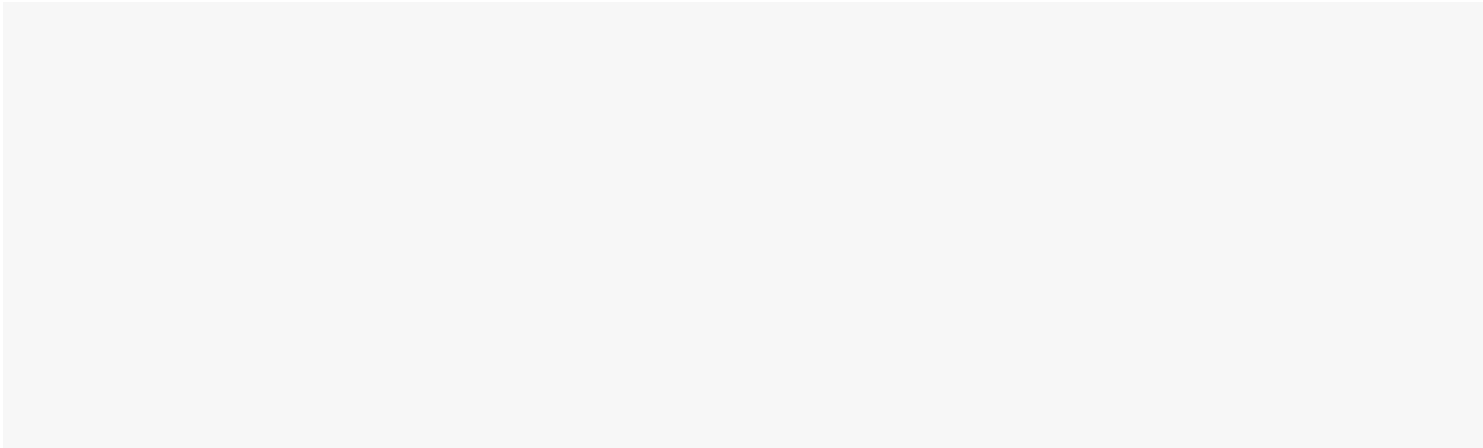
4:31 PM · Nov 10, 2019



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STORY CONTINUES BELOW



For her part, Wright-Gilbert says it's not her job to be cheerleader for an underperforming system, but to speak for the city's commuters.

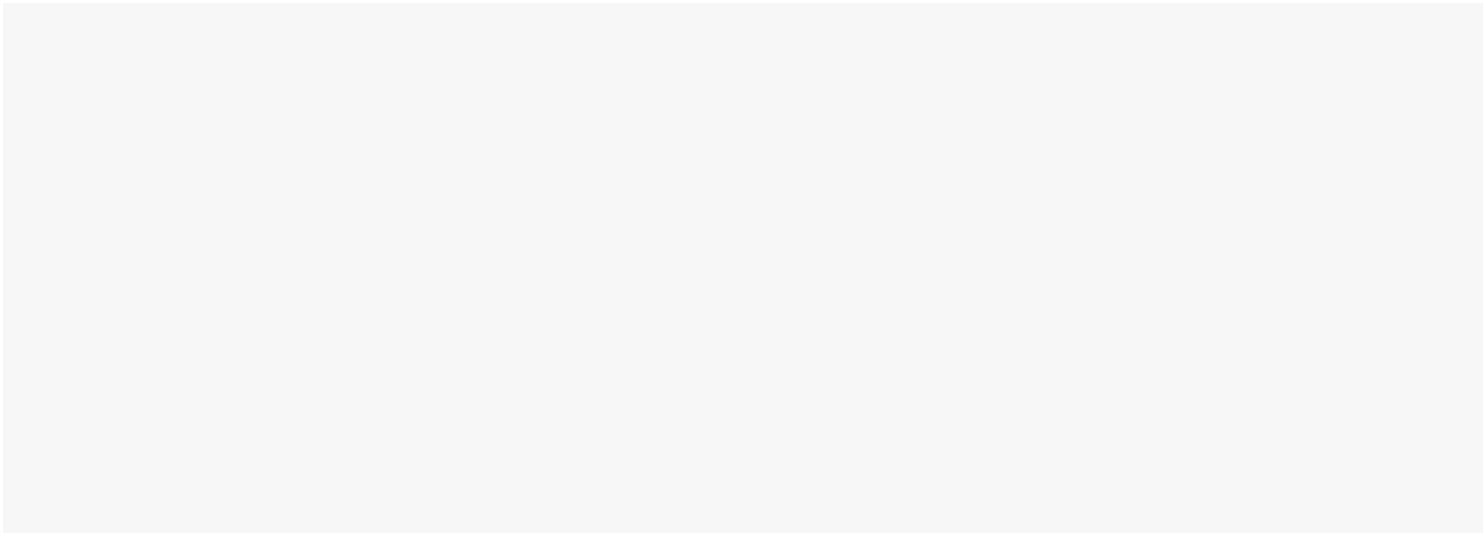
She uses Twitter, she says, to be transparent about that work and to report on her personal transit experience: "I'm a transit user. I don't lie. I don't spread propaganda. I report what I see. It's truth."

She has also reported on what she smells: sewage at Parliament Station. But even that led to headlines when one transit commissioner suggested that, as a woman, she was particularly sensitive to bad odours.

It has been that kind of year for the rookie transit commissioner: Controversy seems to follow her.

A civil servant, Wright-Gilbert sought out the citizen transit commissioner's job in an attempt to fill out her résumé with more volunteer work. She read about the initiative online and thought it was an interesting approach.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW



One of 92 applicants for the unelected post, she was among four people chosen by a panel of city councillors. "They knew exactly who they were getting," she insists. "I don't hide who I am."

Born in Oakville, Wright-Gilbert grew up mostly in Ottawa, where her father worked as an RCMP officer, and later, as a foreign affairs analyst. Her mother was a court reporter, and Wright-Gilbert did the same job for a few years at the Ottawa Courthouse until the domestic abuse trials began to wear her down.



Sarah Wright-Gilbert, a citizen transit commissioner, outside the Tunney's Pasture Station. PHOTO BY WAYNE CUDDINGTON /POSTMEDIA

She's a self-described speed-reader and "politics nerd" who has watched her favourite TV series, *West Wing*, a dozen times. "If Jed Bartlet ran today, I would vote for him," she says. "Or Josh Lyman."

She fosters rescue dogs, fundraises for animal rescue charities, advocates for the homeless, and speaks openly about how she's learned to deal with depression and anxiety.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

A graduate of Carleton University's political science program, she also champions political involvement, particularly at the local level. "The decisions made at the municipal level touch your life most directly," she says.

Wright-Gilbert knows that some people think she's positioning herself to run in Cumberland Ward, where a byelection could be held if Coun. Stephen Blais succeeds in capturing the provincial seat for Orléans on Feb. 27. But she insists that politics is not on her immediate horizon — even though some people have already approached her about launching a candidacy.

"It's something I'm thinking about for 2022 or later," she says.

Wright-Gilbert works full-time as an engagement policy advisor on the cannabis file for Health Canada, and uses accrued overtime and vacation time to fulfill her duties as transit commissioner. (The position's only remuneration is a free transit pass.)

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

She had no idea, she says, how city politics worked when she attended her first meeting in January 2019.

That changed quickly when the oft-delayed LRT launched in September, and problems mounted alongside commuter angst. Those problems, she says, exposed divisions on the commission between

those who wanted to circle the wagons and defend the system, and those who wanted full transparency.



The O-Train makes its way through Ottawa. PHOTO BY TONY CALDWELL /Postmedia

Wright-Gilbert says the commission, like council itself, is controlled by councillors allied to Mayor Jim Watson. “I’m slightly disappointed in how city hall operates,” she says. “Part of my disillusionment was realizing what was really going on at city hall, discovering that it’s true that there is a Watson club, or JW crew...I think it’s really unfortunate: If your councillor is not in the crew, you kind of get screwed.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Wright-Gilbert keeps a list on her iPhone of everything that she wants to raise at the next transit commission meeting. This month, it includes questions about the odour at Rideau Station, water leaks, track vibrations, malfunctioning fare machines, and the “brake issues” raised by a British consultant in an interview with Coun. Carol Anne Meehan.

She intends to script her questions and followups to maximize her allotted time at the next commission meeting on Feb. 19.

“If I have been any sort of catalyst for people no longer accepting the status quo of crappy service from OC Transpo, then good. Good,” she says. “It has made me slightly unpopular with some folks, but my only motivation is to improve public transit for everyone.”

What do you think of the LRT?



STORY CONTINUES BELOW

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