




RECOVER, SOLIDIFY, EVOLVE

Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA)
Strategic Plan 2021-23

January 2021



LAND AND TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are gathered on the unceded land of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

The Canadian Urban Transit Association invites you to join us in acknowledging the Indigenous communities, their elders both past and present, and future generations.

This acknowledgement demonstrates our commitment to dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Chair	page	4
Our Approach		5
Pillars of the Strategic Plan		6
Three Strategic Pillars, Nine Priority Actions		7
Strategic Pillar 1: Recover		8
Strategic Pillar 2: Solidify		12
Strategic Pillar 3: Evolve		15
Implementation		18



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present CUTA's strategic plan. It's a product of deep engagement with the transit community and incorporates the advice and recommendations from CUTA's Covid recovery task force, which conducted extensive consultations of its own.

We've developed this strategy as transit systems, and the communities they serve, have been ravaged by a pandemic. The transit community acted quickly and innovated often, even as revenue streams evaporated as ridership plummeted. I like to think, however, it brought out the best in CUTA. We helped bring the transit community together to speak with one voice about the need for transit to be included in relief packages. And we helped leverage \$4.6 billion in unprecedented operating support from the federal and provincial governments, while preparing for the recovery ahead with our recovery task force

There aren't many reasons to remember 2020 fondly. But to me, at least, it showcased the benefit of CUTA. Yet as beneficial as CUTA has been, it can improve. The challenges we faced in 2020 didn't go away on New Year's Day. How transit is funded likely needs overhauling. And, accordingly, the role of transit's industry association will change, too. Indeed, it already has.

Through the pandemic, our advocacy and communications became more robust. Our facilitation role expanded to help transit systems learn from each other as the pandemic unfolded. These changes, in turn, helped shape this plan. One that I hope will make us more strategic, more nimble, and better-suited to meet our members' needs.

I'd like to thank CUTA's staff both for their efforts during the pandemic and their contributions to our strategic plan. I'd also like to thank my colleagues on the executive committee for their time and insights. And with that, please allow me to present CUTA's strategic plan for 2021-23 in the hopes it will help us serve the transit community better.

*Alain Mercier, CUTA Chair and CEO,
Réseau de transport de la Capitale (RTC) Quebec.*

OUR APPROACH

To develop our strategic plan, we conducted an extensive consultation, through group workshops, one-on-one conversations, and written submissions. We heard of the pride with which transit professionals serve their communities, and the worries about Covid's impacts on public transit—during the pandemic itself and in the likely long recovery that will follow.

Several themes emerged:

- What does transit look like after Covid? Will riders return and when? Are telecommuting and learning from home here to stay?
- How can we continue to advocate effectively for ongoing operating support, as a first priority, and longer-term capital investments that let transit be part of a green recovery?
- How can CUTA best serve our transit members in providing urban mobility in these trying times?
- How can CUTA best serve our business members, through better networking opportunities that share their innovations and new technical standards?
- How can CUTA engage with and welcome a new generation of mobility entrepreneurs, including micro, on-demand, and rideshare service providers?



PILLARS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

We may, in years to come, think of things in pre- and post-Covid terms.

Few sectors of the economy are likely to invite such a clear contrast as public transit. Before the pandemic, it was a ubiquitous part of daily life for millions of people. But as their lives were reshaped by Covid, so, too, was public transit.

Put simply, where crowded buses and trains during rush hour were once a symbol of an essential role taken for granted, during Covid, transit systems planned for service levels that would minimize crowds entirely. To reflect our new normal, the strategic plan builds on three pillars.

1

RECOVER

Sustain transit during Covid and help it recover after the pandemic ends

2

SOLIDIFY

Solidify CUTA's role as the leading champion for public transit

3

EVOLVE

Reflect an evolving urban mobility sector

THREE STRATEGIC PILLARS, SEVEN PRIORITY ACTIONS

1

RECOVER

Sustain transit during Covid and help it recover after the pandemic ends

- 1.1 Advocate for the recovery task force's recommendations to be implemented
- 1.2 Support more efficient transit systems through innovation
- 1.3 Continue to advocate for ongoing operating support from governments, and long-term capital investments

2

SOLIDIFY

Solidify CUTA's role as the leading champion for public transit

- 2.1 Expand membership and increase revenues through innovation
- 2.2 Ensure staff capacity to carry out the strategic plan

3

EVOLVE

Reflect an evolving urban mobility sector

- 3.1 Sustain capacity as the authoritative source of Canadian transit data and insights
- 3.2 Expand connections with and increase value to business members and new mobility players

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: RECOVER

Sustain transit during Covid and help it recover after the pandemic ends

CUTA's priority has long been to advocate for improved funding for transit. Pre-Covid, our focus was on capital spending and speaking with governments about the economic and environmental benefits that building more transit provide. Post-Covid, the focus shifted to the need for operating support to replace the revenue lost due to plummeting ridership.

Our most critical priority now is to avoid a downward spiral for transit. Without ongoing operating support, service reductions are inevitable. These in turn will make service less convenient and more crowded, pushing more riders away, leading to further revenue losses. As such, CUTA must maintain its focus on obtaining operating support through the pandemic and its related ridership losses, while continuing to advocate for transit's role in a green and inclusive recovery.



Priority Action 1.1

Advocate for the implementation of the recovery task force's recommendations

Over the spring and summer of 2020, CUTA concurrently advocated for emergency operating support and, through its recovery task force, conducted extensive consultations that are included in its report. It contained five key objectives:

- Operating public transit safely and continuing to address operating shortfalls, in part through strengthened partnerships with organizations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, boards of trade, Trajectoire and other stakeholders to advocate for ongoing operating support from governments
- Decongesting cities and creating jobs by ongoing capital investment to build our capital network
- Fostering social inclusion especially for members of the community who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic
- Reducing emissions and taking climate action
- Making transit more efficient through innovation

These are interconnected. If, for example, ongoing operating support is not obtained it's all but certain that anyone who can afford to drive likely will as service becomes more infrequent and crowded. We know from what's already happened during the pandemic that people who leave public transit are most likely to switch to private cars, which will increase emissions and make cities more congested. But it will also leave those who can't afford to drive to wait longer to get to work or school.

The core recommendations of the recovery task force—ongoing operating support and long-term, predictable capital investments—will be the focus of CUTA's advocacy work with operating support being our top priority for the duration of this strategic plan.

Priority Action 1.2

Support more efficient transit through innovation

Our recovery task force identified making transit more efficient through innovation as an important goal. This has both financial and non-financial applications. Financially, transit systems must ensure public funds are spent in the most efficient manner possible and reduce costs where they can. But another efficiency is transit's ability to help people get where they need to go through connections with other aspects of urban mobility such as walking, cycling, and ridesharing.

Achieving this will entail greater collaboration with other players and embracing new ideas, including areas identified by the recovery task force, such as:

- Supporting systems' evolution from being transit first-and-only agencies into mobility agencies by providing resources to the integrated urban mobility task force
 - Investing in new mobility technologies to support transit use and help prepare transit agencies for the increased digitization of the rider experience
 - Establishing a transit innovation accelerator fund to help agencies adopt new technologies and approaches
- Within the executive committee, ensure there is a position responsible to act on the innovation pillar of our recovery strategy, or designate a current Executive Committee member
 - Continuing to improve how we promote diversity in public transit hiring
 - Facilitating opportunities for new mobility players to shape CUTA's integrated mobility agenda

Priority Action 1.3

Continue to advocate for ongoing operating support from governments, and long-term capital investments

Effectively advocating for public transit is the heart of CUTA's mandate and value proposition. It must continue through the pandemic, and its after-effects—ones that are likely to last for several years. And while pre-Covid, our advocacy focused on Ottawa, as our priority shifted to the need for operating support it highlighted the role of provinces and municipal champions.

To help us continue this important work, we will develop toolkits, tailored to be relevant to our core membership categories—large transit systems, medium and small transit systems, business members, and new mobility members—to show the benefits of investing in transit.

This will help CUTA and our members measure and communicate the value of public transit by:

- Connecting it with wider economic, environmental, and social cohesion public policy goals
- Creating products, such as animations, video, infographics, and talking points to more effectively communicate the benefits of public transit

- Exploring ways to run a national public awareness campaign to support systems building customer confidence in public transit and encouraging their return

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: SOLIDIFY

Maintain CUTA's role as the leading champion for public transit

During the pandemic, CUTA's role as public transit's leading champion came into sharp focus. This extended beyond the emergency financial support we helped obtain from governments. We also created ways for transit members to collaborate with weekly webinars for conventional and specialized transit, provided weekly Covid updates, as well as adapting our data collection to be better-placed to answer governments' and the media's questions about Covid's impacts on ridership.

We will solidify this role and build on it through two priority actions.



Priority Action 2.1

Expand membership and increase revenues through innovation

Covid didn't only reduce transit systems' and businesses' revenues. It also affects CUTA's. As municipal councils and the private sector look to cut costs, association fees, conferences, and training are often the first areas to experience cuts. To replace this lost revenue, CUTA will need to be innovative in expanding our business membership base and diversifying our revenue opportunities.

To do so, we will:

- Make CUTA the leader in transit research by partnering with funding agencies to deliver top-of-class research products that leverage potential new funding
- Closely examine the American Public Transit Association's (APTA) experience in expanding and diversifying its business membership
- Develop marketing material that is more engaging and more digital, to reach new members and respond to fewer people working in traditional office environments
- Create a platform for public-private partnerships to improve contracting and risk management for major transit projects
- Promote the industry's ability to create jobs through manufacturing and technology to better support our business members
- Increase personal, one-on-one outreach by the CEO to prospective members
- Improve and expand our ability to facilitate our business members' engagement with government decision-makers and procurement officials

Priority Action 2.2

Focus on delivering value for members

The pandemic caused CUTA to engage in more robust advocacy to governments, and improve our communication, both externally and with our transit members. As with most parts of society, we also changed how we met, by moving to a virtual conference and trade show. These changes will continue, and include a revised, simpler, and more user-friendly website. But more can be done to focus on areas that deliver more value for our members.

To do that, we will:

- Use online webinar platforms to maintain a committee structure, training programs, and facilitate members learning from each other
- Plan for continued virtual conferences and trade shows, and explore how hybrid conferences may take place to account for reduced travel spending over a prolonged period
- Review our training offerings to ensure they meet transit members' needs while maximizing revenue and minimizing inefficiencies
- Follow best practices in other sectors about conducting tradeshow and facilitating business development in a virtual world
- Partner with transit experts, think-tanks, and institutions to affordably create thought-leadership products that are clear and concise
- Regularly review members' priorities through Covid and its after-effects to ensure content is relevant and valued. Assess and restructure, where necessary, committee functions and mandates to ensure transit-related research and priorities are at the forefront of decision making
- Create a library of Covid-related best practices on topics such as public confidence, winning back lost riders, and new technology. This will be supported through ongoing work with organizations such as APTA and the International Association of Public Transport (UITP)

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: EVOLVE

Reflect a changing urban mobility sector

Our members do more than get people from point A to B. They connect communities, decongest our cities, and take climate action. They're the spine of an urban mobility network that's increasingly diverse, with scooters and bikes; micro-transit; and pedestrian infrastructure that increasingly allows for more door-to-door connections. It's also more reliant on technology than ever before, and becoming more reliant each day. CUTA needs to reflect the changes underway so we can better support our members as they go through them—with a more diverse membership base, and more responsive data collection.



Priority Action 3.1

Keep making our data more current and relevant

To buttress our position as the authoritative voice for urban mobility, CUTA will have accessible, relevant, and accurate data and insights for our members, decision-makers, clients, and the media. During the pandemic, we increased the frequency of our data collection to allow for more current numbers when dealing with the government and media. As we continue to improve our data collection, we will:

- Use the most current and cost-efficient technologies and methodologies to share the most relevant data in the most user-friendly way
 - Ensure how we collect and share data keeps pace with Covid's rapidly changing dynamics
 - Carry out ongoing engagement to ensure we generate data that are useful for a variety of end-users, including transit systems, business members, and governments
 - Monitor other repositories of transit-related data such as the Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium to avoid duplication
- Explore opportunities to collect and share the real-time data increasingly being collected by larger transit systems that have expanded their data analytics capacity
 - Make more data public from the CUTA Fact Book, particularly with governments
 - Expand data visualization on digital properties to tell transit's story better through graphics and maps

Priority Action 3.2

Engage more with the new mobility sector

Among transit systems, we enjoy extensive and near-universal membership. With little room to generate new membership revenue, we need to look to other market segments for growth. A particularly promising area is the evolving new mobility sector, which requires specific and target actions, such as:

- Expand membership in and partnerships with mobility solution companies, including prospecting transportation network and micromobility companies
- Prepare transit systems for an increase in ridesharing, on-demand transit, and micro-transit through sharing best practices
- More collaboration with app-based mobility providers that have proliferated throughout many North American cities, and which saw significant growth during the pandemic
- Support our members' evolution from being transit-only providers to part of integrated urban mobility that includes bike and scooter share providers, micro on-demand transit, and ride hail. We will do this in part by reaching out to these potential members and inviting them to help us expand our activity in urban mobility, in which public transit forms the spine of an interconnected and seamless journey
- Support more peer-to-peer discussions about transit's evolution

IMPLEMENTATION

Accountability is critical to the strategic plan's implementation. Without accountability, it risks lying fallow, lost in the competing workload demands that will invariably arise.

The accountability system should be simple and respect the limited administrative resources available to a not-for-profit association like CUTA, and should include four main components:



1. Single-point leadership responsibility, embedded into the performance evaluation and job description of a designated member of the management team. Deliverables could include:

- Developing and refining the priority actions
- Regularly reporting on implementation progress
- Creating and maintaining a simple user-friendly series of Key Performance Indicators

2. An ad hoc strategic plan steering committee of the Board to steer the progress of the Plan and to hold staff accountable for the Plan's implementation.

3. Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) help staff keep score of, and be accountable for, progress on each priority action. The CUTA management team could consider the following **SMART** checklist to efficiently create and maintain only the most relevant KPI's at a level that's easily manageable:

- **Starting** with the end-state: Define where a particular priority action should be in its outcome at the end of 2021, 2022, and 2023.

- **Measurable:** Focus on identifying and tracking the most tangible indicators, such as cost, revenue or membership and staff participation targets, and report these measurements annually.

- **Achievable:** If a proposed priority action can't be easily measured, it likely won't be met.

- **Realistic:** Be practical about what results can be achieved.

- **Time-sensitive:** Set specific dates for launching, substantially completing and fully completing each deliverable during over the strategic plan's timeline.

4. CEO message to staff: An important step to successful implementation is how the CEO communicates, with the current staff and new hires, the strategic plan's importance.

THANK YOU



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