



Office of the
Auditor General
City of Ottawa

Audit of the Ottawa Police Service's Response to the Convoy Protest – Collaboration with the City of Ottawa



February 2023

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Message from the Auditor General



In January and February 2022, thousands of trucks and protestors from around the country came to Ottawa with what was said to be a protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates and restrictions. While the effects of this protest were felt across the country, the downtown core of our City was the most impacted. For a city well accustomed to large protests, this was an event unlike any the City had ever experienced.

In March 2022, I received requests from both the City Manager and the Ottawa Police Services Board (OPSB) to consider conducting a review of both the City of Ottawa's (the City) and the Ottawa Police Service's (OPS) responses to these events in our nation's capital. As an independent Statutory Officer, I felt it pertinent that I accept the requests and provide, to the oversight bodies and the residents of Ottawa, a depiction of key events and a description of how all parties could improve for similar future events.

On April 25, 2022, the Government of Canada established the Public Order Emergency Commission to inquire into the circumstances that led to the declaration of emergency that was in place from February 14 to 23, 2022, and the measures taken for dealing with the emergency. Given similar mandates, we chose to reach out to the Commission team to maintain an open line of communication.

With the downtown core residents and businesses being the most impacted, my Office embarked on our first ever public consultation from June 2022 to July 2022. To gain a better understanding of how Ottawa residents and businesses were impacted during the protest, we held two virtual consultations, released a survey and allowed those interested to provide direct written submissions to my Office. We received approximately 1,600 responses to our survey, among the highest response rates for a City of Ottawa survey. We are very grateful to those that took the time to share their feedback with us as it greatly assisted my team in the completion of their audit work.

It is important to note when reading the findings in our report, that my Office has the benefit of hindsight. We do our best to apply this lens when setting expectations as to what a reasonable person should have done with the information available to them at the time in question.

We consulted with other agencies performing a similar scope of work to better refine the focus of our audit and ensure we were adding value to the residents of Ottawa, the City,

the OPS and the OPSB, without duplicating efforts. As we could not obtain certainty on the depth of the reviews being conducted on the OPS, we decided to limit our scope to their communication and collaboration with the City and the OPSB. Once these agencies have reported on the results of their reviews/inquiries, additional work may be conducted by my Office.

I would like to take a moment to thank the OPS and City staff that took the time to provide us with the key information we required to conduct our work and for all their collaboration. I would also like to thank my team for their extraordinary dedication, application of exceptional professional judgement and their steadfast integrity in the conduct of their work.

Respectfully,



Nathalie Gougeon, CPA, CA, CIA, CRMA, B.Comm
Auditor General

Introduction

On February 7, 2022, City Council approved [Motion No. 69/13](#), requesting that the City of Ottawa, “commission an independent evaluation of the response to the occupation of the city of Ottawa with a view to better overall governmental agencies’ response to planning, coordination, communications, sharing of resources including deployment”. On March 29, 2022, City management requested that the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) consider undertaking the independent evaluation. The Auditor General accepted this request on March 29, 2022.

On March 28, 2022, the Ottawa Police Services Board (OPSB or the Board) requested that the OAG consider conducting an audit of the Ottawa Police Service’s (OPS or the Service) response to the convoy protest.

The scope of this report is focused exclusively on the activities of the OPS and is limited to the OPS’s collaboration with the City of Ottawa’s staff prior to and during the convoy protest. The OPS’s collaboration and communication with the OPSB has been included in a separate report related to the OPSB.

Background and context

Convoy Protest

It became known to the OPS in mid-January 2022 that a group that called themselves the “Freedom Convoy” was organizing a demonstration to be held in Ottawa on January 29, 2022 and was asking for truckers and supporters to travel to Canada’s capital from across the country. The group intended to protest COVID-19 vaccine mandates and restrictions, stating that they would not leave until all related restrictions and mandates were repealed. As various convoys travelled across Canada, there was widespread media coverage showing the vast number of vehicles on the road, including many tractor-trailers and other heavy equipment.

The Freedom Convoy started arriving on January 28, 2022; it was not until February 20, 2022 that the OPS and its policing partners cleared the convoy from the streets of downtown Ottawa. During this time, protesters were observed engaging in numerous violations of City by-laws, including setting unlawful fires, discharging fireworks, committing noise infractions related to constant honking of horns, blocking and damaging highways, and idling vehicles.

The demonstration caused traffic impacts including blockades and closures of many streets and interprovincial corridors for more than three weeks. Many businesses suffered financial losses during this time. Those living and working in the areas in and

around the centre of the protest (known as the “red-zone”) were significantly impacted and many residents did not feel safe in their neighbourhoods. Over 1,600 City of Ottawa residents and business owners participated in the OAG’s public consultation and shared experiences of how they were impacted during the demonstration. The most commonly reported complaints included noise levels, difficulties accessing transit, diesel fumes, and mental health impacts.

Table 1 below outlines some of the key dates associated with the response to the convoy protest.

Table 1: Timeline – key events relevant to the convoy protest

Date	Events
January 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPS began receiving intelligence about the upcoming convoy protest planning to travel to the nation’s capital. • Planning by the OPS commenced to prepare for their arrival.
January 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Freedom Convoy started travelling across Canada, headed to Ottawa.
January 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City’s Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was mobilized to work with all City services to support the OPS.
January 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Capital Region Command Centre (NCRCC) was activated as the Area Command. • Protesters and trucks started arriving in Ottawa.
January 28 – February 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the convoy parked their large vehicles, blocking streets in Ottawa’s downtown core. • Many protestors engaged in behaviours that violated municipal by-laws. • City residents reported incidents of harassment and negative impacts on their well-being.
February 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mayor declared a municipal state of emergency in the City of Ottawa (City).
February 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ontario Superior Court of Justice granted a 10-day injunction banning honking in the area north of the Queensway. This injunction was brought on by a private citizen.
February 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Integrated Planning Team was established, comprised of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), and the OPS to coordinate a policing response.
February 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Premier of Ontario declared a state of emergency in Ontario.
February 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OPS established the Integrated Planning Command Centre.

Date	Events
February 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The federal government declared a public order emergency under the <i>Emergencies Act</i>. • The City was granted an injunction against the violation of City by-laws (noise, idling, fireworks, open-air fire, and use and care of roads). • The Unified Command Centre was stood up.
February 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim Chief Bell indicated that police had the resources and a plan to bring the occupation to an end. The plan started with handing out leaflets to protesters, warning them to leave or face criminal charges.
February 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorities cleared much of the city’s downtown area of the Freedom Convoy’s vehicles and protesters.
February 20 – 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City staff cleaned up after the Freedom Convoy was cleared out.
February 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The federal government revoked its declaration of a public order emergency under the <i>Emergencies Act</i>. • The Premier of Ontario terminated the state of emergency in Ontario.
February 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mayor terminated the state of emergency in the City.
March 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EOC demobilized and the City returned to normal operations.

Roles and responsibilities

The **OPS** was the lead for the overall planning and response to the convoy protest. The OPS’s priorities included traffic management; maintaining emergency routes; keeping peace and order; protecting monuments; addressing threatening and/or high-risk behaviours; and maintaining the safety of all individuals involved.

The **City of Ottawa’s** response to the protest was coordinated by the EOC. The EOC had to align its activities with and seek direction from the OPS, through the NCRCC, and later the ICC. The EOC had the dual role of:

- 1) Supporting the police in their protest preparedness and response activities; and
- 2) Overseeing and managing City service impacts resulting from the protest (and to mitigate impacts to residents, businesses, and essential services, where possible).

It should be noted that the OPS is a distinct organization that is separate from the City of Ottawa (the corporate entity of municipal government in Ottawa). The two organizations had distinct roles and responsibilities during the response to the convoy protest, as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Responsibilities of the OPS and the City during the protest

Responsibilities	OPS	City of Ottawa
Gathering intelligence from other agencies to inform planning	✓	
Overall planning for the protest	✓	
Planning for effects on City services using intelligence provided by the OPS and the NCRCC.		✓
Creating and coordinating an operational plan for the event	✓	
Leading day-to-day decision-making at the NCRCC	✓	
Obtaining information from the NCRCC to determine impacts on the City		✓
Traffic management (with the OPS being the lead)	✓	✓
Communications to the public	✓	✓
Providing resources and assistance to policing as requested		✓
Providing emergency services to assist residents with basic needs		✓
Deciding whether to cancel / close City services and facilities		✓
Requesting assistance from other policing agencies	✓	
Requesting assistance from other levels of government	✓	✓
Enforcing municipal by-laws at the direction of police	✓	✓
Applying for an injunction		✓
Declaring a municipal state of emergency		✓

OPS and City collaboration and support

The City played a key role in supporting the OPS through the fulfillment of requests made by the OPS, through the NCRCC. Examples of such requests included:

- Providing Traffic Management staff that had expertise on City roads
- Providing, installing, and dismantling concrete barriers and fencing
- Providing heavy vehicles to block emergency lanes (during the early days of the demonstration)
- Providing hand-held radios to the officers that came from other policing agencies
- Towing of vehicles blocking emergency lanes
- Deploying by-law enforcement officers to work with police-led Quick Response Teams within the red-zone
- Providing buses to shuttle police to various locations

- Seeking towing services from other jurisdictions, providing OC Transpo's two (2) heavy-duty tow trucks
- Making City facilities available for use by various policing agencies
- Assisting 9-1-1 with calls received that were 3-1-1-related requests
- Assisting OPS Communications with media advisories and Zoom meetings

The OPS, while the lead for the response, also provided critical support to the City in their response and support of residents during this time. This came primarily in the form of security for front-line workers to ensure continuity of necessary services. Examples of such support included:

- For any front-line staff (public works, paramedic, fire, by-law) that required access to the red-zone, as long as resources were available, officers were made available to accompany them
- Support for Fire, Paramedics, and the Human Needs Task Force by guiding them on the best routes to take given the traffic congestion
- The OPS stationed officers near the Lemieux water treatment plant at the request of the City to protect this critical infrastructure
- The OPS accompanied by-law enforcement officers when ticketing
- When by-law officers got swarmed by protesters, OPS officers were there to resolve the matter peacefully
- In the second week of the protest, the OPS worked with the EOC to facilitate essential worker entry into the secured area

Audit objective and scope

The objective of the audit was to assess whether the collaboration between the OPS and the City of Ottawa in response to the convoy protest was timely and effective in supporting each organization's overall objectives.

The request for the OAG to conduct an audit of the OPS's response to the convoy protest was a full-scope audit. However, because of other agencies performing a similar scope of work, our Office chose to limit the scope of our OPS audit, at this time, to their collaboration with City of Ottawa staff prior to and during the convoy protest. Once these agencies have reported on the results of their reviews/inquiries, additional work may be conducted by the OAG.

The scope of the audit did not include OPS's collaboration with any policing agency or partner outside of the City of Ottawa.

Please see [Appendix 1](#) for the audit objective and criterion.

Conclusion

The convoy protest that took place in Ottawa in early 2022 was an unprecedented emergency that significantly impacted both the OPS and the City of Ottawa. The OPS was the lead policing agency in managing the event and the City of Ottawa had a responsibility to support the OPS, and to manage the significant implications on the municipality and its residents.

The audit noted the tireless efforts of officers and senior leadership within the OPS, who worked under the harshest of conditions (e.g., staff vacancies/shortages, frigid winter temperatures, and extended shifts) throughout the convoy protest to ensure the safety of the residents of Ottawa, the protestors and their fellow officers. Equally, City of Ottawa staff and management worked relentlessly, many behind the scenes, to ensure the continuation of City services and to provide support to the residents of Ottawa.

We can conclude that, to the extent possible, the OPS and the City worked effectively together towards a common objective and each organization was able to support the other in providing resources, infrastructure and expertise, when available.

With the benefit of hindsight, the audit identified opportunities for improvement in the area of collaboration between the OPS and the City to be considered in the response to future emergencies where both organizations are implicated. This includes sharing intelligence and plans with the appropriate City representatives to ensure a timely and coordinated response, leveraging the expertise of City staff, as appropriate, as well as formalizing roles and responsibilities for communications.

Audit findings and recommendations

1. OPS did not consider the OEM as a prime partner in pre-planning

Mandated by the province, the City's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is responsible for managing the City's Emergency Management Program (EMP) and has the responsibilities of planning and preparing prior to an emergency and ensuring the continuation of essential services during an emergency. Typically, when planning for an upcoming protest, the OPS engages with specific City representatives who would be implicated based on the nature of the protest. Because most protests are not deemed as a City "emergency", the OEM would not be a typical partner for the OPS in planning for the event, nor does a process exist for notifying the OEM.

Between January 14 and 23, 2022, the OPS reached out to specifically implicated City departments including Transit Services, Traffic Management, Fire and Paramedics to involve them in pre-planning for the protest. The OPS did not reach out to the OEM, the central unit within the City that is responsible for coordinating emergency planning. As the City was receiving developing information about the size and nature of the protest and the potential impacts on the City, the OEM initiated contact with the OPS on January 24, 2022. Due to a lack of timely notification, the City was unable to commence coordinated planning activities until mere days before the arrival of the protestors.

Although each City department had a responsibility to raise significant concerns to management, once the magnitude of the event, the possibility of it being high risk and the likelihood of significant impacts to the City were known, the OEM should have been notified by the OPS.

RECOMMENDATION 1 – EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH OEM IN SIGNIFICANT FUTURE EVENTS

The Deputy Chief should work collaboratively with the GM of Emergency and Protective Services (EPS) to develop a process to ensure timely engagement of the OEM (along with all other relevant City departments) when the size and nature of a protest (or other similar event) has the potential for significant City impacts. This will ensure that the handling of future similar events are grounded in the City's Emergency Management Plan to support a City-wide coordinated response.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 1

The Convoy demonstration was unprecedented. The OPS's response to the Convoy required a significant number of resources as well as complex operational decisions. Following the Convoy demonstration, the OPS adapted and implemented changes to

ensure that a more coordinated approach with its partnering agencies and services is achieved.

Please find below examples of larger events that occurred in the City of Ottawa in 2022 since the Convoy that were peaceful and/or successful:

- St. Patrick's Day;
- Next Generation Convoy;
- Motorcycle Demonstration;
- Derecho Storm;
- Canada Day;
- Solidarity with Dutch Farmers;
- Capital Pride; and
- Panda Games (University Football)

The OPS agrees with and supports this recommendation to engage City departments, as required, to support a City-wide coordinated response. This is achieved through the Integrated Event Command Table ("IECT"), which has commenced as of Q1 2022 to include all required City departments and partnering agencies/services. The IECT is engaged from the early stages of event planning and decision-making for City events and is carried on right through the event itself. The representative from the OEM holds a seat at the IECT at all levels throughout the entire process. The OPS is in the process of establishing the IECT and will continue to review and refine where applicable.

The Specialized Policing Directorate and Strategic Planning Branch, in consultation with other sections and partnering agencies, will establish a Terms of Reference for the IECT by Q4 2023.

2. Intelligence shared by OPS with the City was insufficient, impacting the effectiveness of the City's planning

As noted above, while City departments were engaged by the OPS prior to the convoy's arrival, the intelligence shared with the City was not sufficient to allow the City to conduct effective planning for the event. The City is dependent on the OPS for intelligence collection as there is no function or ability to do this within the City. However, the OPS controls and limits the amount of intelligence shared with other parties as intelligence sharing is strictly on a need-to-know basis. While the OPS was unable to share classified intelligence that originated from other law enforcement / national security agencies, the OPS could have shared, as they saw fit, unclassified

intelligence and planning information developed within the OPS. In the days leading up to the convoy's arrival, City departments received very little information from the OPS.

Given the large number of vehicles and protesters expected, a key aspect of planning for the convoy was traffic management. The OPS had developed a 46-page traffic plan as of January 26, 2022, based on the intelligence available at the time, but did not share the plan with the City. Only a brief single page plan showing police unit posts was shared with the City's Traffic Management unit on January 29, 2022. Despite the OPS's plan being based on information that was constantly changing and the fact that the behaviour of incoming protesters was unpredictable, sharing the established traffic plan, when it was in a sufficiently finalized state, would have enabled the City to be better prepared.

As an impact of this, without being provided the traffic plan, Transit Services did not get sufficient information to properly plan for bus service impacts. Transit Services found itself in the position of having to re-route, create detours, post signage, and get information out to the public all at the last minute. Having the OPS's traffic plan would have at the very least made Transit Services aware of the planned road closures, road restrictions, staging / stacking areas, and ingress and egress routes.

In planning for the event, the City also received conflicting risk ratings from different sources. The whole range of high, medium, and low risk ratings were provided depending on who provided the information. The City may not have adopted the appropriate planning and preparedness approach for the event because of the varying risk ratings received and the overall limited intelligence received.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – SHARING OF INTELLIGENCE WITH THE CITY

The Deputy Chief should work collaboratively with the GM of EPS to develop a process to have the OPS regularly share intelligence on matters that have City-wide impacts with select individuals (with security clearance) within the City's OEM. This will enable the City to receive more timely and detailed intelligence to aid responses to future events.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 2

The OPS's Intelligence section has revised its internal processes to assess and determine the potential sharing of intelligence to the appropriate City individuals/departments, specifically the OEM and INTERSECT¹, to ensure better

¹ INTERSECT is a multi-jurisdictional, all-hazards emergency preparedness program within the National Capital Region (NCR). It is designed to enhance emergency management and preparedness initiatives in the NCR.

planning and decision-making of all future events. This is achieved through the IECT, which has been implemented to include all required City departments and partnering agencies/services.

The OPS agrees with and supports this recommendation to continue to share information and unprotected intelligence, as previously mentioned, with the City's selected point person through the IECT for timely collaboration and decision-making. The OPS is in the process of establishing the IECT and will continue to review and refine where applicable.

The Specialized Policing Directorate, Intelligence, Information & Investigations Command, and Strategic Planning Branch, in consultation with other sections and partnering agencies if required, will establish a Terms of Reference for the IECT by Q4 2023.

3. OPS did not consistently engage City resources in traffic management throughout the convoy protest

Generally, subject matter expertise in the area of traffic planning and management lies within the City's Traffic Management unit. As part of their responsibilities, they:

- Work closely and effectively to deal with major incidents with partner agencies including Ottawa Police, OC Transpo, Société de transport de l'Outaouais (STO), Ontario Provincial Police, Ministry of Transportation of Ontario, City of Gatineau, Sûreté du Québec, and the Ministry of Transportation of Québec;
- Create and deploy special response plans and real-time traffic management strategies including signal timing modifications, police assistance, flexible lane designations controlled through variable message signs, installation of detour routes; and
- Communicate to the public the impacts to the road network of the incident via the web, media, and Variable Message Signs.

During the convoy protest, traffic management was police-led; however, given the impact of the protest on City roads, transportation and services, the City needed to be more actively engaged in traffic planning. The OPS could have missed key considerations, like the impacts on City departments and services (e.g., OC Transpo, snow removal, fire, paramedics, etc.) by excluding the City from planning and ongoing traffic management.

The audit found that the development of the initial traffic plan was not collaborative between the OPS and the City. The City initially provided the OPS a template for a traffic plan but when it was determined that the size and nature of the protest needed a

substantially different traffic plan, the OPS did not re-engage the City in its development. Further, as noted in Finding 2 above, this detailed traffic plan, dated January 26, 2022, was not shared with the City.

During the first two weeks of the convoy protest, the OPS did not leverage the expertise of, nor collaborate with the Traffic Management unit for ongoing traffic management. The City found itself reacting to OPS requests (e.g., assistance with setting up barriers) related to traffic. Traffic Management found the situation chaotic as requests were being made of them (which were not always feasible), but they were not privy to the communications related to the traffic plan behind the requests. Despite this, the City did not formally request that the OPS include them in traffic planning prior to the convoy's arrival, nor throughout the first two weeks of the event.

It was not until February 21, 2022, two days prior to the end of the protest, when the City's Traffic Management unit's expertise was utilized by the OPS, and the City obtained knowledge of the detailed traffic plan from there onwards.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – COLLABORATION WITH CITY TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

The Deputy Chief should work collaboratively with the GM of EPS to develop a process to ensure that for future events of significant size and nature, the City will be engaged by the OPS for integrated planning. This would include actively engaging the City's Traffic Management unit to carry out its traffic incident management responsibilities and make use of its subject matter expertise in traffic management. Further, City input should be sought when developing traffic plans. Traffic related documents should be shared, along with any changes throughout the event, as traffic management has significant implications to City services.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 3

The OPS agrees with and supports this recommendation. The representative from City Traffic Management now holds a seat at the IECT at all levels throughout the entire process. The OPS is in the process of establishing the IECT and will continue to review and refine where applicable.

The Specialized Policing Directorate, in consultation with other sections and the City, will establish a Terms of Reference for the IECT by Q4 2023.

4. Roles and responsibilities of OPS and City communications departments

Since the convoy protest was a police-led event, with numerous downstream impacts on City services, it was important for the City's Public Information and Media Relations (PIMR) department to collaborate with the OPS's Communications department to ensure that all published communications were timely, appropriate, coordinated and accurate.

The audit found that PIMR and OPS Communications worked collaboratively throughout the event. For instance, PIMR would often help set up and coordinate logistical support for OPS media availabilities, and the OPS would review and approve public service announcement content being proposed by the City that fell under OPS jurisdiction before it was published. Both groups worked collaboratively by relying on the established good working relationships the individuals in the positions had with each other. While this worked well during this event, individuals in the positions could change and as a result, the relationship between the two communication offices could be different in the future.

Currently, there is no documented process that provides guidance on how PIMR and OPS Communications should work together during an emergency. Established and formalized roles, responsibilities, and authorities will enable both organizations to provide clear and consistent messaging to the public in a timely manner.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – FORMALIZE COMMUNICATION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN OPS AND THE CITY

The Director of Communications, in collaboration with the Chief Communications Officer, should document their respective roles, responsibilities, authorities and formalize guidance on how the organizations will work together during emergencies to ensure there is adequate review and approval of communications before they are published.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 4

The OPS agrees with and supports this recommendation. Through the IECT a corporate communications structure and process has been established unifying all stakeholders. This process will continue to solidify and strengthen the operational relationship between the OPS and the City. While the OPS has made this change, the Service will continue to review and refine where applicable.

The Corporate Communications Branch, in collaboration with the Chief Communications Officer of the City of Ottawa, will establish a Memorandum of Understanding by the end of Q2 2023.

It is important to note that the OAG has not audited the content of management responses to our recommendations for accuracy. These responses are direct comments from Management. The status and completion of the recommendations will be assessed by the OAG at a later date.

Appendix 1 – About the audit

Audit objective and criterion

The objective of the audit was to assess whether the collaboration between the OPS and the City of Ottawa in response to the convoy protest was timely and effective in supporting each organization's overall objectives.

The request for the OAG to conduct an audit of the OPS's response to the convoy protest was a full-scope audit. However, because of other agencies performing a similar scope of work, our Office chose to limit the scope of our OPS audit, at this time, to their collaboration with City of Ottawa staff prior to and during the convoy protest.

The criterion listed below reflects the limited scope of this audit.

1. Collaboration between OPS and the City of Ottawa	
1.1	The collaboration between the City and the OPS allowed the City to make timely and effective decisions, to support the OPS as the lead for the response, and to request assistance from the OPS to provide continuity of City services, when necessary.

Audit approach and methodology

Audit staff performed the following procedures to complete this audit:

- Reviewed relevant documents (e.g., meeting minutes, correspondence from custodians, media releases, memos to City of Ottawa Management / Council, correspondence);
- Interviewed and performed walkthroughs with stakeholders from the OPS and the City of Ottawa; and
- Performed other analysis, as deemed necessary.

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