

Dear Hollaback! Ottawa Team,

Thank you for asking me for my thoughts on this important safety issue. I do appreciate it, and I my responses follow:

Katherine Hobbs Kitchissippi Ward #15 Responses to Hollaback!

No woman has avoided public harassment in their lives, and no place is immune either. I've lived and experienced this harassment in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

No generation has been free of this harassment.

My mother knows it.

My sister and I know it.

My nieces, I'm sad to say, now know it too.

It's humiliating, it's de-humanizing, and we must do whatever we can to end it.

Inequality between the sexes, economically and socially, remains at the root of this.

From the suffragette movement to today, women bear the brunt of this inequality, and as a woman elected to office, I am a minority. Just 6 of the 24 members of Council in 2010-2014. That ratio is the same in the House of Commons, where there too just 25% of MPs are women.

That's why I love going to schools to inspire girls to get involved in their communities, their government and their politics. It's why I've always made myself available for Equal Voice and other organizations promoting women in politics. It was women running campaign bootcamps in 2010 that gave me the help to run for political office and win. I now give back in the same way to all ages of women who are interested in any leadership roles.

I applaud organizations like Hollaback! for their tireless work with the City and OC Transpo.

As a Councillor and as a Transit Commissioner, I have, and I will continue to work to address this and most importantly, make budget requests for the 2015 budget and the 2014-2018 terms of Council priorities to make the funding available to make these priorities a reality.

1. Fund public service ads to raise awareness about harassment in public spaces

We want to see the city sponsor impactful messaging about gender-based violence with a focus on prevention and in particular, bystander intervention. For inspiring examples, check out the ads developed by Hollaback! Philly.

Yes. I support funding for traditional and digital media campaigns to raise awareness about harassment in public spaces. If re-elected, I would be interested in working with Hollaback! and other organizations to develop a strategy and budget for this.

2. Hire more OC Transpo special constables

As part of its “10-point Safety Plan”, OC Transpo’s approach to safety was reviewed by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The review recommended hiring more special constables but OC Transpo has publicly stated that this is not going to happen in the foreseeable future. We believe riders, operators and existing special constables would benefit from more staff.

Yes, we need to make this a priority through the budget process 2015. There’s no point in having APTA review our safety if we aren’t going to implement their proposed solutions. The cost is significant, but public safety must be our top priority. The way to get things funded is to make them budgetary priorities, and I will.

3. Prevent sexual assault at mass gatherings

Recent research from the Ottawa Hospital reveals that there is an increase in reported sexual assaults at mass gatherings. As the city is responsible for granting permits for these events, it could require that staff at any festival, sporting event, or holiday celebration be trained in preventing and responding to sexual violence.

Yes. Ottawans love to attend festivals, large and small. For each major event, a SEAT (Special Events Advisory Team) meeting takes place, bringing everyone to the table to address issues that could turn a great event into a problem for the community and festival goers. Using this time-tested model, we can bring the issue of sexual assault and harassment prevention and response into the required mix of considerations. There are opportunities for outside groups like Hollaback! to be brought in to these discussions as well as internal services like Ottawa Public Health.

4. Promote comprehensive sexual health

Ottawa Public Health is doing great work in the city to talk safer sex. We'd love to see that programming include conversations about consent and healthy relationships.

Yes. Following our very successful Sext it Smart campaign, the topic of consent and healthy relationships is a natural one to promote healthy discussion about. As a member of the Board of Health, this is something I would like to work with you to make a priority in 2014-2018.

5. Show commitment to making public transit safer for women & LGBTQ* folks

Hollaback! Ottawa is collaborating with our partners in the VAW community to advise OC Transpo's Safety Working Group. We've brought recommendations like better advertising for current safety features and the development of anonymous reporting mechanisms. But improving safety will require continuous consultations and follow-up.

Yes, I agree.

As a woman who doesn't own a car, I use transit on a regular basis, including at night. I know what it's like first hand to feel unsafe on transit, and we can and will do more to make it better.

As a Transit Commissioner, I've been committed to public safety for all users of transit, and I want to keep progressing on this important issue. We've had success working with all interested organizations, including Hollaback! to make transit safer. This has included:

- Developing a Safety Charter for Transit Services
- Applying a safety lens analysis to all services to make safety a top priority
- Working with Hollaback! to create a better reporting mechanism, because we know that far too few incidents are actually being reported and we need to change this
- Better data sharing with Ottawa Police Services and other stakeholders
- Researching and implementing global best practices
- Re-assessing training of staff and special constables to address these issues

- Expanding public education campaigns to encourage reporting and supporting all people involved in transit: riders, employees, and the public at large.
- Expanding the Safe Stop program to allow any rider feeling unsafe to be dropped anywhere along a route after 7 PM, rather than after 9 PM

Thanks to these and other efforts, reported incidents were down significantly from 2012 to 2013. What we need to assess is if this represents a true drop in incidents or just in reporting. All women and members of the LBGQT community need to feel safe riding transit, and need to feel that their reports of incidents are wanted and taken seriously.

We can and will do more, working with partners like Hollaback! In the winter, it's dark far before 7 PM, so we may need to expand Safe Stop to whenever it is dark, we may need broader or more targeted public outreach campaigns. My commitment is to continue to work with all partners and implement best practices from all over the world to ensure our transit system is safe for all users.