

'Pimisi' label for LeBreton transit station gets approval

Package of station names, paint scheme for LRT trains approved

BY DAVID REEVELY, OTTAWA CITIZEN AUGUST 21, 2013



Plans for the LRT LeBreton station.

Photograph by: Handout photo, City of Ottawa

OTTAWA — The plan to rename the LeBreton Flats transit station for the Algonquin word for “eel” sailed through the city’s transit commission Wednesday, with only one commissioner questioning it.

The name, “Pimisi,” was proposed by the Algonquins of Ontario as part of a wholesale re-examination of the transit station names along the light-rail line that’s now under construction through downtown. With the nearby island complex in the Ottawa River being of huge historical significance to the Algonquins, the city plans to give the station at LeBreton an Algonquin theme and asked the group for a name suggestion.

Unlike other station names — such as “Parliament” for one at Queen at Metcalfe streets, and “uOttawa” for one mainly serving the University of Ottawa — the Pimisi name didn’t have to pass a stringent series of tests to make sure it’s easy to read and say and instantly understandable to residents and visitors alike. The public at large hasn’t been consulted about it, either.

“It really doesn’t do anything for the Confederation Line,” observed Innes Coun. Rainer Bloess, the one transit commissioner to vote against the name. Victoria Island in the river, the heart of aboriginal presence in the capital, is probably due to be renamed, Bloess said, suggesting the Pimisi label might

be more appropriate there.

Honouring heritage is important, Bloess argued, but not at the expense of making the \$2.1-billion rail system easy for thousands of people to use.

The Ottawa River used to be rich with eels, which natives caught for food and saw as sacred creatures because of their fast swimming and ability to survive in both fresh and salt water. The eel population crashed with the construction of hydroelectric dams, though, and the Algonquins have pursued a quiet campaign to try to get the species restored, particularly by building eel-friendly routes around the dams.

In the end only Bloess dissented on the decision. He also objected to renaming what's now the Train station on the Transitway to "Tremblay," after the road it's on, joined in that by Beacon Hill-Cyrville Coun. Tim Tierney. The Tremblay station is getting a subtitle, "Via Rail," to tell riders it's where they can catch inter-city trains, and Bloess said the simple fact that it's getting a second name indicates the "Tremblay" label isn't good enough.

It's not unanimous even that the "Train" name has to go, though apparently it's unanimous at least within OC Transpo. It's confusing enough now as the name of a bus stop, the transit agency's chief planner Pat Scrimgeour said, but it'll get worse.

"We cannot say, 'Take the train to Train to catch your train'," Scrimgeour said, because that's an Abbott and Costello routine waiting to happen. Via just calls the actual train station "Ottawa Station," which is no use for naming an LRT stop, and calling it "Via" or something like that could be a problem if Via ever stops operating it. Via Rail has only been around since the 1970s, but the passenger station opened in 1966. "Tremblay" may have its flaws but it's the best solution to a knotty problem, in OC Transpo's view.

The worry that a corporate name might not last forever didn't dissuade the commission from renaming the current Campus station "uOttawa," even though the 165-year-old school has only called itself after its Internet address for about a decade.

"We're expecting we're going to keep it for good," commission chair Diane Deans said, even if the university stops using the uOttawa label someday.

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