



WHAT WE HEARD

PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY



**TOWING SERVICES REGULATORY REVIEW
EMERGENCY AND PROTECTION SERVICES
CITY OF OTTAWA**

1.0 Project Overview

The City of Ottawa's Emergency and Protective Services Department has been monitoring issues concerning towing services in Ottawa for several years. As part of the Council-approved 2019-2022 By-law Review Workplan, City staff have been directed to conduct a review to determine whether specific regulations are needed for towing services in Ottawa. The scope of this review includes towing companies, tow truck drivers, and storage yards, in order to address issues of municipal concern such as the health and safety of the public, consumer protection, and protection of property and persons.

Issues under consideration include:

- ensuring protection for consumers, particularly at accident scenes;
- vehicle storage rates and practices; and
- safety concerns related to public and driver safety.

Options being explored for this regulatory review include:

- establishment of a business licensing regime for towing service operators and tow truck drivers;
- prescribing fees for towing services;
- separate regulations for vehicle storage or impound lots; and
- rules to enhance consumer protection and security.

After the City began its review, the Province of Ontario [announced](#) the establishment of a task force to improve provincial oversight of the towing industry. The City is now working in collaboration with the Provincial task force and monitoring outcomes to ensure that recommendations for municipal towing regulations align with any new provincial initiatives.

Report Purpose

Consultations with the public, industry specialists, and other related internal and external stakeholders have been identified as crucial and vital aspects of this regulatory review. In addition, the Towing Services Regulatory Review team is examining practices and learned experiences from other jurisdictions which have similarly regulated the towing industry.

In addition to providing a summary of the City's consultation methods, this What We Heard document will also provide analysis of data collected during the public consultation and engagement phase of the towing regulatory review. This report outlines the main comments and concerns received from members of the public in relation to the regulatory issues

presented. For more information on the Towing Services Regulatory Review, please consult the [Engage Ottawa website](#).

Engagement Overview

Several consultation methods were used during the public engagement phase of this regulatory review. These engagement exercises included:

- A public web survey available through Engage Ottawa for a period of one (1) month;
- An email survey for specific industry stakeholders;
- Detailed consultations with interested stakeholders, including tow truck operators and drivers, provincial ministries, law enforcement agencies, and insurance providers; and
- A jurisdictional scan of towing regulations found in other Ontario municipalities.

Public Survey

This report outlines key results from the public survey which was accessible in both English and French on the Engage Ottawa Towing Services website from May 20th to June 20th, 2020. The survey solicited feedback from members of the public about their experiences with towing services, specifically focusing on issues of municipal concern such as consumer protection and public safety. The public survey included 19 questions, which are attached to this document as *Appendix A*.

2.0 Key Findings

Demographics

The public survey received **891 responses**. The demographics of the respondents are captured below.

Gender of Respondents:

- Male: **65%**
- Female: **27%**
- Transgender: **6%**
- Gender non-conforming: **1%**
- Decline to answer: **1%**

Age of Respondents

- 19-34 years old: **27%**
- 35-44 years old: **24%**
- 45-54 years old: **21%**
- 55-64 years old: **15%**
- 65+ years old: **8%**
- Decline to answer: **5%**

Resident of the City of Ottawa and Affiliation with Towing Industry

Out of the 891 responses received:

- 847 respondents self-identified as current residents of the City of Ottawa;
- 33 respondents self-identified as non-residents of Ottawa;
- 11 responses declined to answer their residency;
- 5.61% of respondents self-identified affiliation with the towing industry (i.e. towing company owners, tow truck drivers);
- 1.91% declined to answer; and
- Approximately 90% of respondents were members of the public and their experiences were based on being a customer of towing services.

Towing Industry Regulations Survey Results

Public survey results demonstrated that 97% of respondents agreed that the City should regulate the towing industry to promote public safety and consumer protection. In addition, public survey participants were asked about their experiences when using towing services and the majority rated their experience as good. It should be noted that 61% of respondents currently have a roadside assistance provider. A high proportion also declined to answer specific questions related to their experience, however staff note that 90% of those who declined to answer indicated that they have not used a towing service in the last 2 years.

Consumer Protection

Members of the public generally indicated the need for regulating rates for towing services and for customers to be informed of all applicable fees, location of storage facility, and how to access their vehicle prior to services being rendered.

More specifically, the responses from the public also generated the following:

- With respect to disclosure of fees prior to the tow and the regulation of towing service prices to avoid overcharging, over 90% of respondents agreed that the City should regulate rates;
- A high majority also agreed that an agreement should be provided by the driver to the consumer;
- More than 90% of respondents rated consumer protection and towing fees as highly problematic;
- Several comments received from the public focused on high costs with towing and a lack of paperwork to document the contract;
- The comments provided by the public indicated that consumer protection, towing rates and issues with vehicle storage were the main areas of concern that the City should investigate when developing policy recommendations; and
- 98% of respondents agreed that drivers should follow basic rules of conduct while serving customers. Overall, the data shows that the public supports regulations to protect consumer towing services in Ottawa.

Public Safety, Driver Training and Rules of Conduct

Public survey results show that respondents agree that there should be training for tow truck drivers and personal protective equipment should be mandatory, with 92% of responses in favor of a safety training program for tow truck drivers. Several comments reflected safety concerns such as tow trucks speeding, damage to vehicles during tows, tow trucks approaching too close to accident scenes, and drivers on scene not wearing appropriate visibility clothing.

3.0 Comments Received by Email

In addition to the surveys and consultations, staff reviewed 62 emails received through the Engage Ottawa project page. Of these, 34 were from the general public, 11 were from the industry and 19 were generated through inquiries.

The comments revealed support for regulations. Many respondents shared stories of high fees for towing services and difficulty in retrieving their vehicle in storage, as well as concerns about processes used by towing operators at the scene. Consumer protection, towing rates and storage of vehicles were common themes in these responses.

Emails received from the industry noted a favorable response to some type of licensing regime, citing fairness as a key factor. Drivers and operators are aware of the public perceptions towards the towing industry and their concerns focussed on dispatching and choice of towing services as well as consumer protection and towing rates.

The 19 responses that were received under the inquiry category were mixed between members of the industry and the public. Among the issues addressed in these responses were accident scene management, consumer protection, towing rates and storage of vehicles.

4.0 Emerging Themes

- Public survey results support municipal regulations related to public safety and consumer protection.
- Members of the public identified consumer protection, rules of the road, and public/driver safety as the main areas of concern with the towing services.
- Many respondents commented on the requirement for documentation, transparency, and disclosure of fees by towing providers to customers prior to towing services being provided.

5.0 Next Steps

All feedback received through the consultation process will be reviewed and assessed by the City of Ottawa Towing Services Regulatory Review team to help develop the final policies and recommendations that will be included in a staff report to the Community and Protective Services Committee and City Council for their consideration and final approval. City staff will continue to consult with internal and external stakeholders and provide updates on the file through the Engage Ottawa website.

Appendix A: Public Survey

Towing Services Regulatory Review – Survey

The City is looking for your opinion on various options for towing services regulations. Your contribution will help determine what issues are important and how they might be addressed.

Please share your opinion on the proposals noted below:

1. The City needs specific regulations for tow truck companies and drivers in order to promote better public safety and consumer protection.
I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion
2. The City should verify that a tow truck vehicle operating in Ottawa has the necessary provincial commercial vehicle certificate and inspection approvals.
I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion
3. 3. Training for tow truck drivers should be required to ensure safety and protection of property.
I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion
4. Tow truck drivers and towing companies should be required to inform consumers of all applicable towing fees, as well as the location where the vehicle will be towed, and how to access the vehicle after the tow, prior to the consumer agreeing to the tow.
I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion
5. Tow truck drivers and towing companies should be required to use specific towing authorization forms that set out applicable fees or fee schedules and that are signed by the customer prior to towing a vehicle.
I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion
6. All tow truck drivers should follow basic rules of conduct when serving consumers.
I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion
7. Tow trucks should have clearly visible identification displayed on the vehicle with the company's name and contact information.
I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion

8. The City should regulate rates for towing services to help prevent overcharging.
 I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion
9. The City should ensure that tow truck drivers wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as vests and other necessary protective clothing.
 I agree I disagree Undecided/No Opinion

Please answer the questions below as instructed:

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, how problematic are the following aspects of the towing industry?

Rules of the road (accident scene management, conduct of drivers, training)

(Low)					(High)
1	2	3	4	5	

Public/Driver Safety (inspection of vehicles, equipment on trucks, personal protective gear)

(Low)					(High)
1	2	3	4	5	

Consumer Protection (transparency of fees, location and access to vehicle while stored)

(Low)					(High)
1	2	3	4	5	

Fees for towing services (fees for tow, recovery, administrative fees, wait fees and storage)

(Low)					(High)
1	2	3	4	5	

11. On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you rate your knowledge of consumer rights regarding towing services in Ontario?

(Low knowledge)					(High knowledge)
1	2	3	4	5	

12. Have you used the services of a towing company in Ottawa within the last two years?
Yes No Unsure/Don't remember

13. If you answered yes to Question 12 above, how would you rate your experience with towing services?
Bad Acceptable Good No opinion

If **“Acceptable”** or **“Good”**:

What did the tow operator do well?

If **“Bad”**:

What problems did you experience with your recent tow?

14. What is your greatest concern when agreeing to have your vehicle towed?

Tell us about yourself

15. How do you identify:
Male Female Transgender Gender non-conforming

16. What is your age group?

- Under 18
- 18 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- OR 65 or older
- Decline to answer

17. Do you live in the City of Ottawa? Yes No

18. Are you affiliated with a towing company or a related industry? Yes No

19. Do you currently have a roadside assistance provider (coverage from an insurance provider, or car manufacturer, or other membership program)?

Yes No Unsure