

# Report offers 'lessons learned' from LRT project



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Basing cost-estimates on more detailed plans, talking to property experts about tricky land acquisitions and including OC Transpo as soon as possible are some of the key recommendations contained in a long-awaited “lessons learned” report that sheds light on what the city could take from the early days of its Confederation light-rail project and apply to the proposed \$3-billion expansion.

Two years into construction of the \$2.1-billion Confederation line, the city hired consultants to offer an assessment of the challenges faced during the planning, preparation and procurement of the largest infrastructure project in Ottawa’s history.

Consultants from Deloitte and local firm Boxfish Group conducted interviews with 19 city staff members, advisers and government officials who have been involved in the Confederation project from the early planning stages right up to its current construction.

Although it was only released to councillors on Friday by city manager Kent Kirkpatrick, the report — or an earlier draft of it — was used previously to justify awarding a sole-sourced \$60-million contract to plan the next phase of LRT.

Boxfish’s lead consultant is Brian Guest, the brother-in-law of Chris Swail, a key figure in planning phase one and now the director in charge of implementing phase two. Boxfish also had a wide-ranging contract for the Confederation Line, for tasks from setting up the project’s website to challenging basic assumptions like where exactly the rail line should go.

The original cost estimate for the lessons-learned study was \$100,000, but it ended up costing half that, Kirkpatrick wrote in a memo to councillors.

Among the recommendations contained in the 20-page report:

- **Better estimates:** The federal and provincial governments each approved a \$600-million contribution based on an initial cost estimate that did not include construction inflation, financing and transaction costs, the report says. In the future, estimates should be based on more detailed plans and include \$200 million for financing and transaction costs. Upper levels of government should also be urged to provide some contingency in case the total cost changes once advanced designs are completed.
- **Property experts:** The city needed to negotiate land usage/transfer with a number of governmental stakeholders, including the National Capital Commission. The report

suggests the city approach the federal government and request that lands required for the project be granted in recognition that LRT will enhance the capital and benefit federal public servants. The report also recommends engaging with property experts early on to identify “potential challenges with specific alignments relating to property acquisition.”

- **Project bundling:** The decision to bundle the construction of the Confederation line with the widening of Highway 417 has been hailed as one of the most successful parts of the project. The move put contractor Rideau Transit Group in the driver’s seat to ensure the highway widening work would get done in time to use the new lanes for buses in order close the eastern leg of the Transitway (to convert the roadway to rail). The city should do this again for any infrastructure projects that could have a “material impact” on the second phase of LRT, the report says.
- **Getting OC Transpo on board:** Including the city’s transit operator in shaping service levels, the customer experience, vehicle’s operational specifications and safety is critical, the report says.
- **Paying for progress:** One area of the Confederation line that isn’t working well, according to the report, is the use of milestone payments, as measured against completion of certain “fixed” components. Verifying and even defining milestones has been hard so the report suggests using a more flexible.

When it’s completed in June 2018, the 12.5-kilometre Confederation line will run from Tunney’s Pasture in the west to Blair station in the east, and will include a 2.5-kilometres tunnel downtown.

The project’s ambitious second phase would extend light rail service further east and west, and also extend the O-Train Trillium line further south.