

The train is coming: Confederation LRT line begins to take shape



[Matthew Pearson, Ottawa Citizen](#)

October 13, 2015

The city's new Alstom Citadis Spirit LRT trains are being assembled at a massive assembly plant on Belfast Road. Roger Lalonde / City of Ottawa

In a little over a year from now, Ottawa residents may be able to sneak a peek at the light-rail trains set to transform the city's public transportation system.

Shiny, new Alstom Citadis Spirit trains could begin travelling up and down newly laid tracks between Blair station and Belfast Yard, where the vehicles are being assembled, in order to test the system in advance of its opening in 2018.

In the meantime, hundreds of people are working above and below ground every day on the massive undertaking, which city officials are often quick to remind people is Ottawa's single largest infrastructure project since the building of the Rideau Canal.

Matthew Pearson brings us up to speed on what's finished and what lies ahead in the coming months.

Transitway transformation

Closed since the end of June, the eastern leg of the Transitway between Hurdman and Blair stations is a full-on construction site these days. The roadway surface from Blair to just east of St. Laurent station has been torn up as crews pulverize the asphalt and prepare to re-grade the road and lay tracks. Many of the old stations between Hurdman and Blair have been torn down or are in the process of being demolished.

At Hurdman, a key transit hub that links east-west buses with those serving the south end, foundations for elevated guideways are almost complete and crews are now starting to pour concrete for the deck. A new temporary bus station at Hurdman station is now in use.

The big dig

There's a lot going on underground, as crews dig out the 2.5-kilometre tunnel downtown.

The eastern section, from an entrance at the University of Ottawa to the future home of Rideau station, is finished, and crews are almost halfway through digging out the station cavern.

Part of the central section — from about Lyon and Queen streets to Parliament station, which is at Queen and O'Connor — is also complete. Excavation at Parliament station is half done.

And in the west, excavation is complete from an entrance near LeBreton Flats to Lyon station (roughly below Lyon and Queen streets), while the station excavation is 86 per cent done.

Digging out the final stretch of tunnel between Parliament and Rideau stations, which will involve going underneath the Rideau Canal, has not begun.

Scott Street facelift

Much to the chagrin of some Mechanicsville and Hintonburg residents, who remain upset about the city's plan to re-route hundreds of Transitway buses onto the residential street, crews are currently widening the north side of Scott between Bayview Road and Smirle Avenue. They're also doing some work around Bayview station to connect a multi-use pathway on either side of the O-Train station, in hopes of creating a smoother east-west connection between downtown and Tunney's Pasture. The western end of Albert Street is being widened to prepare for the Transitway detour.

A section of Transitway between Empress Avenue and Merton Street is set to close by the end of this year, meaning a reduction in buses running on that section, while the section from Merton to Tunney's Pasture will close next summer.

From construction site to assembly line

A massive complex on Belfast Road, just down the way from OC Transpo's St. Laurent Boulevard headquarters, is currently being transformed into an assembly plant for the Alstom trains.

"You're looking at a moth that's going to turn into a butterfly," is how Paul Tétreault characterized it (Tétreault is the commercial director for OLRT Constructors, a joint venture that is building the \$2.1-billion project).

Crews were busy tearing down the decommissioned Transitway stop at Blair station in early August. Closed since the end of June, the eastern leg of the Transitway between Hurdman and Blair stations has become a full-on construction site to make way for the Confederation LRT line. Matthew Pearson / Ottawa Citizen

Huge windows allow light to fill the 4,000-square-metre, hangar-like space with natural light, as workers begin to assemble the underframe of a train. The 12-metre-long white frame sits on a heavy-duty rotisserie that lets workers turn it easily so they never have to do jobs over their heads. All they do is finish one side, flip it over and work on the other side.

By next April, the first train fully assembled in Ottawa is expected to be finished. And when the assembly line is working at full capacity, workers here will pump out two completed trains every month.

Once the Confederation line is up and running in 2018, this is where vehicles will be maintained and stored overnight, and where OC Transpo's LRT administration will be located.

Local jobs, local money

On any given day, there are about 800 people working full-time on the Confederation line — welders, mechanics, carpenters, electricians and administrative staff. Tétreault says subcontractors and firms in the Ottawa area have already received more than \$400 million in work, and that figure is set to reach \$900 million by the time the project is done.

Meanwhile, a team of 18 assembly technicians and several support staff are currently being trained at Alstom's plant in Hornell, N.Y., about 140 kilometres southwest of Buffalo. They are learning the ropes and will eventually return to Ottawa and train other workers. In all, about 100 people will work on the Ottawa assembly line.

When the trains start rolling

The Rideau Transit Group, the consortium that's building the LRT line, is aiming to complete four kilometres of track by next fall, so testing of the trains can begin soon after. The fully automated system must undergo extensive troubleshooting — including operating under the brunt of two Ottawa winters — before it will be ready to go.

“We get to deal with snow, ice, freezing rain — all that good stuff,” Tétreault said.

RTG will then bring in some OC Transpo operators for training and test all the trains on the completed 12.5 kilometres of rail before the Confederation line opens to the public in May 2018.

By the numbers

50%: Excavation work at future Parliament station completed

800: People working on the Confederation line every day

\$900 million; Money Ottawa-area firms are expected to collect during construction

18: Assembly technicians currently being trained at Alstom's plant in New York state

\$2.1 billion: Cost of Confederation line project

May 2018: Targeted completion date

mpearson@ottawacitizen.com
twitter.com/mpearson78