

Extend O-Train south before widening Airport Parkway, Watson says



[Matthew Pearson, Ottawa Citizen](#)

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The city should hold off on widening the Airport Parkway until it extends the O-Train further south, Mayor Jim Watson said Wednesday, after admitting lower-than-expected revenue from development charges has delayed a number of road projects.

An environmental assessment for widening the two-lane arterial between Brookfield Road and the airport is underway, and the first stretch, between Brookfield and Hunt Club Road, was to be completed by 2018, at an estimated cost of \$31 million.

But that target has now been pushed back until 2020 at the earliest.

Other projects the city says are now also delayed until then include:

- Building a new four-lane road between Orléans Boulevard and Navan Road
- Widening Mer Bleue Road from two to four lanes between Brian Coburn Boulevard and Renaud Road
- Realigning Palladium Drive in the vicinity of Huntmar Road to a new north-south arterial
- Building a new underpass on Earl Grey Drive where it meets Terry Fox Drive

All this work, approved in 2013 when council passed the transportation master plan, was scheduled to be completed in the first phase, between 2014 to 2019.

Members of the federal, provincial and municipal governments along with transit officials tour the construction site for the future Tremblay Station, part of the O-Train Confederation Line Light Rail Transit (LRT) project Wednesday January 13, 2016. Darren Brown / Ottawa Citizen

The plan was built on the premise that the city would collect from development charges and senior levels of government somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$43 million to \$45 million each year for growth-related road projects, but that figure has since been revised to \$26 million annually. Development charges help pay for the cost of infrastructure required to provide municipal services to new development, such as roads, transit, water and sewer infrastructure, community centres and fire and police facilities.

The mayor says the road projects have to be “slowed down simply because the money is not there and we want to adopt a fiscally responsible plan that these projects have to be funded by (development charges), and if there’s less construction for housing and office buildings and so on, there’s less money in the treasury.”

But Watson also seems to agree with those who believe the city should focus on extending the O-Train to Riverside South, including a \$155-million spur to the Ottawa airport, in hopes that will make a dent on rush-hour congestion before widening the parkway.

“If we’re able to secure funding for the O-Train extension to the airport, then we should get shovels in the ground for that before we do the Airport Parkway expansion,” Watson said.

An O-Train connection to the airport and the extension of the Confederation Line in the east end to Trim Road, at an estimated cost of \$160 million, weren’t originally in the plan for the second phase of LRT, but the city wants both.

“We’ve had some very positive discussions on both those projects,” Watson said, adding the city hopes the province will pay the full cost of the Trim Road extension, while the federal government would pick up the tab for the airport link.

The airport authority has said it is prepared to contribute to the estimated \$35 million cost of building a light-rail stop inside its passenger terminal. But officials, reached late Wednesday, say they were disappointed to learn through the media that the road widening has been deferred because they believe the rail link and extra lanes on the parkway are both necessary.

“The more that the south urban area expands, the more pressure is going to be put on by regular commuters,” said spokeswoman Krista Kealey. “It is going to put traffic to the airport in jeopardy and we think that’s going to have a long-term impact on the region from a tourism and business point of view.”

Ottawa South MPP John Fraser — who joined Watson, federal Infrastructure Minister Amarjeet Sohi and others for a tour of the construction site where the future Tremblay LRT station is being built next to the Ottawa train station — said his priority for addressing congestion on the Airport Parkway is the O-Train extension.

“I’d like to see that move forward quicker,” he said. “I think it should be a priority for all Ottawans to connect our airport to our public transit system.”