

Chiarelli: Here's why we need to widen Highway 417



[Bob Chiarelli](#)

Ottawa Citizen

December 23, 2016



Widening Highway 417 may be a popular move for many commuters. Tony Caldwell / Tony Caldwell/Ottawa Sun/QMI Agency

The following rebuttal was submitted in response to David Reevely's [Dec. 20 column](#) critical of a plan to widen Highway 417:

Here we go again: another critical investment in Ottawa's transportation infrastructure criticized by Ottawa Citizen columnist David Reevely.

This time, Mr. Reevely suggests it's a bad idea for the provincial and federal governments to widen Highway 417 because then more cars would use it. Also, the project is unnecessary

because we're building a train. And finally, he contends, the money could be used elsewhere. On footbridges, for example.

It's important to remember that the province's role is to work with the city and the residents to build a transportation system that helps move people around the community. It may be difficult for those who walk to work downtown to appreciate commuting by other means from longer distances.

I suspect people driving on the 417 during rush hour will be thrilled to learn the highway will be widened to accommodate the increased traffic. I also suspect drivers are pleased with the train line being built. Once complete, those who can make the switch to the train, will. Others, for a variety of reasons, won't. Successful cities such as Ottawa need transportation options (roads, transit, active transportation) and that is exactly what the provincial Liberal government is delivering.

There are 10 unique highway improvement projects in the region. There are new bus lines and a new light-rail system that will completely transform how Ottawa residents navigate the city. More than \$5 billion worth of new transit is under construction and planned in Ottawa, funded by all three levels of government. There is also \$30 million in gas-tax funding shared with the City of Ottawa every year to help expand and improve public transit, and we are investing \$10 million to help municipalities expand cycling infrastructure.

When I was the first mayor of the amalgamated City of Ottawa, we took a public transit-first approach to transportation because we had been falling behind, and I saw first-hand how public transit improved travel for all residents. The centrepiece, of course, has been bringing light rail to Ottawa, which has been the focus of much of my political career, from the project's inception to its implementation and now expansion.

I'm proud of the investments government made then, and I'm proud of the investments the province is making now. They are important, and they will improve the quality of life in Ottawa and the surrounding region.

On the ground – on the roads, rails, bike lanes, sidewalks, and, yes, even footbridges – people see and feel the difference. They want the government to invest in multiple transit options so they can make decisions that make sense to them and their families. In this rapidly changing world, not all lives are the same, and not all days are the same. We need to be flexible, and we need our cities to be flexible. That's why we're not only widening the 417 but investing in myriad projects that will make it easier for people to get from A to B and for products to get to market.

Our city is thriving. New jobs are being created and new families are moving in. We need to ensure Ottawa remains one of the most attractive cities in the world in which to live and to open or expand a business, and a large part of that relies on a smart, efficient multi-modal transportation network that gives people the flexibility they need to live the lives they want.

We know widening Highway 417 won't solve every problem, but together with the other investments we're making alongside the city and federal government, we will be moving people faster, increasing opportunity, and building an even greater city we'll be proud to leave to our children and grandchildren.

***Bob Chiarelli** is the minister of infrastructure and the MPP for Ottawa West-Nepean. He is a former Ottawa mayor.*