

Ottawa Sinkhole Day 3: LRT tunnel below sinkhole is flooded, engineers discover



[Matthew Pearson, Ottawa Citizen](#)

Published on: June 10, 2016



As engineers on Friday ventured into the LRT tunnel far below Rideau Street to assess the damage caused by the massive sinkhole that opened up earlier this week, crews above them continued working around the clock to repair the damage at street level. (Jean Levac/Postmedia)
Jean Levac / Ottawa Citizen

A 300-metre stretch of the LRT tunnel underneath Rideau Street, where a massive sinkhole opened up this week, is flooded, the city said Friday.

As crews at street level continued working around the clock to fill in the hole and repair damaged utilities, engineers ventured into the tunnel two dozen metres underground where excavation had been underway at the time of Wednesday's road collapse, which swallowed a minivan and one piece of construction equipment, and caused huge headaches for transit users and businesses in the area.

There were no injuries and no cause has been established, though many wonder if it could be connected to the LRT digging.

“Over the next several days, water will be pumped out to allow teams to better assess the impact and plan the path forward,” city manager Steve Kanellakos wrote in a late-afternoon memo sent to Mayor Jim Watson and city councillors.

It was the first confirmation that the sinkhole, which was estimated to be about five metres deep, has affected the tunnel.

Earlier Friday, Kanellakos told Postmedia in an interview that engineers believed there would be no permanent damage to the tunnel, which is a key part of the \$2.1-billion Confederation LRT line set to open in 2018.

“It’s just a question of getting out some of the water, some of the debris that might have come in,” said Kanellakos, who added he’d had a productive meeting with RTG officials Thursday.

“They are focused on getting back to work,” he said, noting it’s still early to know when crews might return to their jobs at that location. RTG is working on a “tunnel reinstatement plan.”

Elsewhere underground, work continues in the three downtown stations, including Rideau, which is just east of the sinkhole site. Crews were down to the final 50 metres of tunnelling at the time of Wednesday’s road collapse.

RTG officials don’t fear the timeline for opening the LRT line will be delayed, Kanellakos said.

No one from RTG was available for an interview, but the company is supplying the city with regular updates, said spokeswoman Kathryn Keyes.

Meanwhile, workers at street level focused on repairing the damaged infrastructure after they had poured several thousand cubic metres of concrete into the hole and waited for it to set.

Rideau Transit Group, which is building the LRT, is coordinating the repair work with various city departments and the utility companies.

Pipes located deepest in the ground used to move sewage and stormwater were to be fixed first, followed by water and utilities, including power, natural gas and telephone, which are located closer to the surface, Kanellakos said.

As of Friday evening, Colonel By Drive has been opened to Daly Avenue northbound, and southbound from Mackenzie Boulevard in its entirety.

Kanellakos had hoped the city would be able to reopen Sussex Drive for the weekend while crews worked in the hole, but his late-day memo said that wouldn’t be possible.

“Staff from RTG have met with city departments and utilities to understand their specific needs and to assemble a schedule and plan for conducting repairs on affected infrastructure. Based on those discussions, staff are recommending that road closures remain in place until the full extent of the impact on surrounding infrastructure can be determined,” the memo said.

The stretch of Rideau Street between Dalhousie and Sussex will also remain closed for some time yet, Kanellakos said.

“They’re still thinking one to two weeks is a reasonable timeframe for them to finish that work, barring any other things they discover,” he said.

After all the underground infrastructure is fixed, more concrete will be poured and then the roadway will be resurfaced.

The street closure has been a pain to many transit users and pedestrians this week, but most drivers should already be accustomed to avoiding the area.

Rideau between Sussex and Dalhousie was closed to most vehicle traffic last August as part of LRT construction, while one lane in each direction was restricted to OC Transpo and STO buses, taxis, delivery vehicles and LRT construction vehicles.

City officials did not hold a media briefing on Friday, as they had on Wednesday and Thursday, but reiterated several key pieces of information heading into the weekend.

- Road closures and transit detours remain in place while crews repair the damage and restore services
- Sidewalks on the north side of Rideau between the Tim Hortons and Dalhousie streets and on the south side of Rideau between Nicholas Avenue and Dalhousie have re-opened, facilitating the reopening of businesses in those areas
- Additional signs and digital boards have been put up to help the public navigate around the site
- Water service has been fully reinstated to most buildings in the area and Ottawa Public Health's precautionary boil-water advisory only remains in place for some businesses (it was lifted for the Rideau Centre food court)