

# Massive sinkhole in heart of Ottawa causes gas leak, power outage and forces evacuation



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Commuters should be prepared for a lengthy disruption from the enormous sinkhole that spans the width of Rideau Street and swallowed a van whole Wednesday morning.

At a press briefing in the afternoon, Mayor Jim Watson and other experts from the city said it was too soon to say how long Rideau Street will stay closed or if the collapse has damaged the surrounding buildings.

“We just don’t know how long it’s going to take,” Watson said. “This is a significant sinkhole in the downtown core.”

The sinkhole forced the evacuation of the Rideau Centre, the Westin Hotel and other nearby buildings and also halted construction on the nearby Confederation LRT line.

The collapse occurred at about 10:40 a.m. on Rideau, just east of the Rideau-Sussex intersection. A broken watermain gushed dirty brown water into the sinkhole, which also ruptured a gas line.

There were no known injuries and no workers from the LRT construction unaccounted for, the city said.

Officers are on the scene directing traffic, but Ottawa Police Const. Marc Soucy advised people to follow the City of Ottawa for updates as repairs get underway. Buses were being rerouted. The [City of Ottawa website](#) announced the following road closures due to the “infrastructure failure”:

- Rideau Street/Wellington Street eastbound is closed between Elgin Street southbound and Dalhousie Street
- Rideau Street/Wellington Street westbound is closed between Dalhousie Street and Sussex Drive
- Sussex Drive is closed between Rideau Street and York Street
- Elgin Street northbound is closed between Albert Street and Rideau Street

OC Transpo buses have been rerouted to Mackenzie King Bridge and Watson said the collapse will disrupt the afternoon and Friday morning commutes.

The city was using a drone to survey the scene from the air. Engineers have not been able to get up close for a detailed look because of ongoing safety concerns.

Twitter exploded with pictures of the sinkhole and reports of the “foul” smell of gas. The collapse soon spread across all four lanes of Rideau Street between the Rideau Centre and Chapters, swallowing a dark van that had been parked outside Chapters. The gas leak was the reason for most of the evacuations, but the leak is now under control.

Hydro Ottawa was reporting a power outage in the area of Rideau, Besserer, Nicholas, Wellington and Sussex affecting 851 customers. Crews were responding with the cause under investigation.

Meanwhile, city officials scrambled to convene an emergency management meeting Wednesday morning after learning about the sinkhole during a council meeting.

“All hands are on deck to make sure the site is secured and no harm is done to any individual,” Mayor Jim Watson told reporters afterward.

The mayor said it’s too early to tell if the collapse was related to tunnelling activity. “All of this information will come to us in the next couple hours,” Watson said.

This is the second sinkhole to open up since the city began working on the 2.5-kilometre LRT tunnel underneath downtown. In February 2014, tunnelling under Waller Street was responsible for a three-metre by three-metre sinkhole that opened up near the intersection of Waller and Laurier Avenue.

“In a project of this magnitude, there are going to be challenges when you’re digging underground,” Watson said. “We do as many tests, soil samples as possible in the lead up, but when you go down and you go deep, there are factors that sometimes are outside of our knowledge and control and I think we’ve had a very good safety record up until this point.

“My first hope that no one is hurt as a result of this accident, we find out exactly what happened and we take corrective actions to make sure it doesn’t happen again and we move on with the project,” the mayor said.

## THE LAST TIME WE HAD A BIG SINKHOLE

On Feb. 20, 2014 a sinkhole developed on Waller Street at Laurier Avenue as a result of digging for the LRT tunnel. Here's what happened before, during and after the road collapsed.



