

Federal budget good news for Ottawa's LRT dreams

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The new federal budget may be awash in red ink, but the federal Liberals did exactly what they promised they would, pouring money in the coming years into infrastructure and transit systems that have been on the wish list for municipalities for years, including here in Ottawa.

As Liberal Orléans MP Andrew Leslie says, the budget is good for light rail transit development in Ottawa.

The budget allocates \$3.4 billion to public transit infrastructure over the next three years through a new Public Transit Infrastructure Fund, and listed accelerated design for new light rail transit lines in greater Vancouver and Ottawa as examples of projects that might see money from the new fund.

This is music to the ears of Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson and those sitting around the council table in Ottawa who hope to not only go forward with their grandiose plans for LRT in the nation's capital, but hope to make some of the future phases of the massive multi-billion dollar project move forward at a faster pace.

In fact, Leslie thinks fast tracking extensions of LRT to Trim Road and the airport, and beyond may be something that is now possible.

“Mayor Jim Watson is doing a great job at articulating that these phase two pluses should be looked at as the same sort of package,” Leslie told Metroland Media after the budget was presented in the House of Commons last week.

“So we have to get it from Blair to Place d’Orléans, then to Trim, but my intention is don’t stop. Don’t go to Place d’Orléans and say, ‘Oh, we’re done.’ Keep going. And the same thing with the airport extension. Don’t stop, just keep going.”

“Keep going” sounds good, although exactly how much of the public transit infrastructure fund that the City of Ottawa will eventually get its hands on will have to be determined in the future as Ottawa will be competing with numerous other cities in Canada seeking that cash.

But for now, Ottawa's LRT plans seem to have been given a greenlight to speed up in the coming years.