

Friday » July
25 » 2008

Ottawa eyes its cut of \$9.3B in federal cash

Light rail poised to get extra money from infrastructure fund: minister

Lee Greenberg

Ottawa Citizen

Thursday, July 24, 2008

OTTAWA -- A \$9.3-billion fund to improve Ontario's infrastructure will be a boon to Ottawa's latest transit plan, says federal Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon.

In an interview, Mr. Cannon said authorities would likely agree to a request for more money for the plan, which is pegged at \$3.85 billion. The money would come from the new Building Canada fund Mr. Cannon announced in London, Ont., Thursday.

"We're waiting for the new project to come in," said Mr. Cannon, the MP for Pontiac. "When it comes in, we'll look at it and we'll see the parts that we can finance under Building Canada. If we need to add additional amounts of money, we'll do so, because it is a priority for us and I believe the Ontario government has also indicated it is important for them as well."

Mayor Larry O'Brien welcomed the joint federal-provincial announcement as "excellent news." But he was unclear just how much cash Ottawa would receive, saying city officials would learn the application process when they travel to Toronto next week.

"We don't know the details ... but if it was based on population, we believe the city of Ottawa should be entitled to somewhere around \$850 million," Mr. O'Brien said. "That's an expectation."

Mr. Cannon was unwilling to put a dollar figure on Ottawa's share of the new funding, however. He said Mr. O'Brien was "premature" in asking for \$850 million. Mr. O'Brien landed on the figure by calculating the city's per capita share of the federal commitment.

"Clearly we will want to do it on a basis that's fair and equitable," Mr. Cannon said. "But to bring it down to dollars and cents, this region vis-à-vis the Kitchener-Waterloo region or vis-à-vis Mississauga is a little premature. We'll look at the projects that, in terms of importance, are the higher ones on the list."

The province and the federal government have reaffirmed their \$200-million commitments towards Ottawa's transit plan. The sum represents two-thirds of what was originally conceived of as a \$600-million light rail project.

That project was scrapped after the 2006 city election, when it was a major issue, and is the subject of a lawsuit by the firms engaged to build it. The new plan involves replacing much of the Transitway with rail lines and extending busways into the suburbs in all directions.

Thursday's agreement will see the province contribute \$3.1 billion in addition to the \$6.2 billion announced by the federal government. The funds are to help cities across Ontario revamp ailing public transit, roads and bridges over the next seven years, providing a boost for the province's flagging economy.

Mr. O'Brien says the city will apply to have several high-priority projects funded first,

including the construction of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge (joining South Nepean and Riverside South), the widening of Hazeldean Road and linking Innes, Walkley and Hunt Club roads into a ring road.

"This is excellent news for municipalities right across Ontario," he said.

Councillor Peter Hume, the Alta Vista councillor who chairs city council's planning committee, said a share of the money for Ottawa would allow the city to fund a range of new projects. "If we were funding a new sewer system at 100 per cent, we can now reallocate two-thirds of that," he said. "It provides a tremendous opportunity for us to do a whole lot more on the infrastructure side."

© Ottawa Citizen 2008

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#). All rights reserved.
CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#). All rights reserved.