

## **Let's Solve Cross River Congestion Without Devastating Our Communities**

By John Forsey

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For the sake of our neighbourhoods, our greater community and our environment, we need to say no to a new bridge across the Ottawa River.

The April 2019 federal budget again raised the possibility of a new bridge across the Ottawa River in the east end of the National Capital Region (NCR) to relieve growing congestion.

At first glance, this may seem like a good idea. Currently, there are five bridges across the Ottawa River in the NCR. The last of these was finished in 1973 and since then, traffic using them has increased incredibly – by ten percent in the last four years alone. Congestion has become a major problem and downtown Ottawa remains plagued by heavy interprovincial truck traffic.

Building a sixth bridge would not solve these problems, but it would create new ones. Currently, trucks moving between Ottawa and Gatineau represent a major source of environmental degradation in the city, particularly in Lowertown and Sandy Hill, which they must pass through to take the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge, one of the two they are allowed on.

A sixth bridge won't fix this. For one, according to the budget, this new bridge will be intended to relieve automobile congestion. For another, many of the heavy trucks crossing the river are making local deliveries concentrated in central Ottawa and Gatineau.

Second, actual experience in Toronto and many U.S. cities has shown that boosting traffic capacity does not reduce congestion. In fact, it makes commuting by car more attractive. Neighbourhoods suffering from congestion now would not be helped; new areas would be hurt.

Third, there is no potential crossing point within the populated areas of the NCR that does not pass through a residential area on one side (and in most cases both sides) of the Ottawa River. Any new bridge built east of the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge would need approaches running through existing neighbourhoods to link it with the 417 (or 174). As these two routes are already heavily congested at peak periods, motorists will take to local streets. The Ottawa River and adjoining green space would also be ecologically degraded.

### **There are alternatives:**

A tunnel joining the Macdonald Cartier Bridge to Highway 417 through central Ottawa. A study has shown it is feasible. The idea awaits an environmental assessment, currently on hold thanks to the federal government's failure to fund a third of the assessment's cost.

Emphasizing cross-river transit over private cars. Rehabilitating the Prince of Wales Bridge as a transit route would provide a direct link between Gatineau's Rapibus corridor and Ottawa's LRT lines 1 and 2 and cost far less than a new bridge's estimated \$1 billion price tag. If, as the 2019 federal budget also claimed, the Alexandra Bridge needs to be replaced, an LRT line could be added, providing a direct transit link between the O-Train in downtown Ottawa and the terminus of the proposed Gatineau LRT. If studies indicate that an additional interprovincial transit link is required east of the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge, consideration should be given to a "green bridge" -- one that would carry electric transit vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists only.

### **What next?**

Collectively, if all our communities work together, we can make sure that ecologically sustainable solutions to truck congestion and the lack of cross-river transit are put in place. Ottawa mayor Jim Watson, Gatineau mayor Maxime Pednaud-Jobin and Rideau-Rockcliffe Councillor Rawlson King have all publicly expressed concern with the bridge proposal. They are on-side. Individually, we need to make our views known during the upcoming federal election and the provincial by-election in Ottawa-Vanier. Raise the issue at the door and in all-candidates meetings. Let candidates know that their and their party's position on this issue will affect how you vote.

For more detail, please consult the website of Sustainable Solutions/ Solutions durables at [www.ssd-ottawa.ca](http://www.ssd-ottawa.ca)

### **Improving Crossings in Canada's Capital Region and the 2019 Budget**

The five interprovincial crossings connecting Ottawa and Gatineau carry close to 150,000 vehicles and 9,000 pedestrians and cyclists each day, an increase of over more than 15,000 since 2015 alone. These bridges are aging, the newest is nearly half a century old, and were built in an era when the National Capital Region had a much smaller population, fewer interprovincial commuters and far less congestion due to truck traffic.

To ensure that these interprovincial crossings remain safe and open for residents and visitors, the federal government's 2019 budget made a number of proposals, chief among them replacing the century-old Alexandra Bridge and addressing what it terms the "demonstrated need" for a sixth bridge across the Ottawa River. Interestingly, the federal government sees this new crossing solely in terms of relieving automobile congestion. Removing the heavy trucks from Ottawa's downtown core and alternatives involving transit are not discussed.

### **Sustainable Solutions/Solutions Durables**

Created in 2009, Sustainable Solutions/Solutions durables arose out of the concerns of many residents right across the region about the NCC's approach to then-current Interprovincial Crossings Study. We believed that none of the NCC's proposed bridge corridors would provide an acceptable solution to the thousands of interprovincial heavy trucks moving through residential areas. We take issue with the NCC's refusal to consider alternatives and believe that better, more sustainable solutions to the truck problem can be found.

For more information, see: [www.ssd-ottawa.ca](http://www.ssd-ottawa.ca)