

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION: EXPANSION OF HIGHWAY 417/17

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH CONNECTION

Purpose

Secure provincial direction to: (1) expedite the Highway 417 extension from Scheel Drive to Bruce Street; and (2) launch a phased Highway 17 program between Renfrew and Deep River focused on converting high-risk signals to interchanges/roundabouts and adding passing capacity, including a 2+1 model where appropriate.

Our Vision

At its core, this proposal is about connection. Highway 17 and Highway 417 are lifelines for our communities, industries, and families. They are the arteries through which opportunity flows – opportunity for economic growth, safer transportation, and a brighter future for everyone who calls the County of Renfrew home.

Our request is simple but transformative:

1. **Expedite the extension of Highway 417** from Scheel Drive to Bruce Street.
2. **Adopt a phased strategy for Highway 17 expansion** between the Towns of Renfrew and Deep River, focusing on:
 - Replacing traffic signals with interchanges and roundabouts.
 - Increasing passing lanes or implementing a 2+1 highway model.
3. Adding the expansion of Highway 417 west of Arnprior to the **New Major Highway Projects Division**

This isn't just about roads. It's about building the pathways to prosperity and ensuring the safety of everyone who relies on these vital connections.

Why Now

The commitment made in 2019 to extend Highway 417 was a promise of progress but progress delayed is progress denied. Today, we still lack a target completion date. This delay not only hinders our economic potential but also compromises the safety of all who travel this corridor.

Highways 17 and 417 are more than routes – they are the backbone of Eastern Ontario's economy. With rail service discontinued since 2010, these highways are the sole means for transporting goods to, from, and through our County. Industries like Garrison Petawawa and Canadian Nuclear Laboratories rely on this critical infrastructure to sustain operations and fuel growth.

With the recent developments in international trade routes and the Premier's commitment to the development of Ontario's "Ring of Fire", for rare earth minerals the Highway 17/417 corridor is the only viable option to get products to market using the Port of Montreal.

Every signalized intersection on Highway 17 represents a potential bottleneck for economic progress and a risk for drivers. Every missed opportunity to improve passing lanes is a missed opportunity to ensure safer travel.

Background

Your Ministry's commitment in 2019 to continue the extension of Highway 417, from Scheel Drive to Bruce Street, was viewed as an exciting and significant step forward for the residents, businesses, and the overall economic growth of the County of Renfrew. However, the County has been disappointed with the slow progress of the project, and there is still no target completion date identified.

Highway 17 and 417, as part of the Trans-Canada Highway, is the primary route connecting Eastern Ontario to the rest of the Province, and Quebec. With rail service discontinuing in 2010, the transport of goods through, to, and from our County can only be by truck, thus making this Highway a crucial economic driver for the County, as well as all of the communities and industries within. The Highway facilitates the effective transport of people, goods, and services throughout the County, as well as to other key destinations such as the City of Ottawa, Greater Toronto Area, and City of Montréal, making this corridor extremely valuable.

Highway 17 is the main access and supply route for Garrison Petawawa and Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, two of many industries who are expanding their transport needs and rely on this Highway. As development of Ontario's "Ring of Fire" advances, the transportation of rare earth minerals along Highway 17 from Northern Ontario to the Port of Montreal has become a matter of national significance. Prime Minister Carney emphasized this priority by highlighting the importance of *"attracting, expanding, and de-risking investment in critical mineral exploration and extraction,"* with further investments focused on minerals essential for defence, semiconductors, energy, and clean technologies.

This message was echoed by Premier Ford, who stated: *"We're building Ontario's economy by investing more than \$200 billion in roads, highways, transit, and other infrastructure projects."*

Following Premier Ford's recent announcement regarding the completion of the twinning of Highway 69 between Toronto and Sudbury, it's worth noting that the identified section spans 164 kilometres and carries an average of 6,506 vehicles per day, according to the Ministry of Transportation's 2021 traffic counts. In comparison, Highway 17 stretches 228 kilometres and sees a higher average daily traffic volume of 8,650 vehicles.

With significant investment being allocated to infrastructure, Premier Ford highlighted the challenges of driving in Northern Ontario, stating, *"My message to people in the city – you have no clue until you come up to the north and you drive in the winter."*

Highway 17, which shares a similar two-lane design to Highway 69, poses significant safety concerns. The Premier himself remarked, *“Like that two-lane – that was like white-knuckled driving down there. If a transport is off by two inches, you’re done.”* This perfectly captures the daily experience of motorists on Highway 17.

A Strategic Path Forward

We understand the complexities of highway expansion, but we also know that meaningful progress begins with bold steps. We propose a phased approach to strategically address these challenges:

- **Major Highway Projects Division:** Request immediate action on Highway 17 by having Assistant Deputy Minister Rudra address the issue through the Major Highway Projects Division (MHPD).
- **Safety First:** Replace high-risk signalized intersections with interchanges and roundabouts to reduce accidents and improve traffic flow.
- **Enhance Efficiency:** Substantially expand passing lanes or adopt the innovative 2+1 highway model. This globally recognized design balances safety with cost-effectiveness, ensuring smoother journeys for all.

These measures aren’t just interim solutions – they are foundational investments in the future expansion of Highway 17 and the safety of everyone who uses it.

Phased Approach

The need to extend Highway 417 to Bruce Street is already justified and growing, but continued expansion of Highway 17 across Renfrew County is equally critical for safety and economic growth.

The County proposes a phased approach, targeting Highway 17’s 11 signalized and numerous unsignalized intersections – many accident hot spots – with interchanges or roundabouts to improve safety and traffic flow until full expansion is warranted.

Currently, only 19% of the 110-kilometre stretch from Renfrew to Deep River has passing lanes, creating unsafe driver behaviour. Expanding passing zones or adopting a 2 + 1 highway model, already in use internationally and on Highway 11 north of North Bay, would significantly enhance safety and efficiency.