

**Ottawa**

## RTG promises to hand over LRT to city in August

If deadline is met, commuters could be riding trains in September

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From left: Mayor Jim Watson, Alstom CEO Henri Poupart-Lafarge and RTG CEO Peter Lauch sat down for a nearly hour-long meeting about the LRT handover June 18, 2019. (Kate Porter/CBC)

Rideau Transit Group is now telling the city it will hand over the \$2.1-billion Confederation Line in the second or third week of August, according to Mayor Jim Watson.



6/30/22, 7:11 AM

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That would mean the system would open to the public during the busy back-to-school season in September, Watson said Tuesday afternoon following a closed-door meeting.

City officials and councillors Allan Hubley and Stephen Blais met with the Rideau Transit Group consortium, including executives from French train maker Alstom, Ellis Don, and Dragados, as well as an executive from STV Inc., who is providing the city independent oversight.

Alstom's CEO had come all the way from France at the mayor's request for the hour-long meeting.

"We were polite but firm that we were not satisfied with the progress this city building project has met so far," Watson told reporters late Tuesday afternoon.



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3 years ago | 1:02

After meeting with Alstom and Rideau Transit Group (RTG) officials, Mayor Jim Watson says residents can now expect to be riding the LRT in September. RTG CEO Peter Lauch says the group is being cautious about giving a specific date because of previous delays.

Watson said he's asked transportation manager John Manconi and city manager Steve Kanellakos "to continue to keep RTG's feet to the fire over the coming days and weeks."

"We'll accept nothing less than the high quality, safe, world-class system that we bought on behalf of Ottawa taxpayers and transit riders," he said.

## 4th time delayed

The mayor called for the face-to-face executive meeting after Ottawa's light rail system was recently delayed a fourth time, missing a hand-over target of June 30.

Watson had promised to tell the companies he was angry, give them a "stark reality check," and urge them to "get their acts together."

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The pressure and phone calls from city officials are working, said RTG CEO Peter Lauch.

"We've seen a marked improvement in Alstom's performance in the last few weeks. They've brought in global experts from other cities."

Alstom told the city Tuesday it expects to complete the trains, which staff have identified as the biggest outstanding issue, by July 7.

## Problematic train brakes and doors

The biggest, most time-consuming issues relate to the train brakes and doors. Suppliers had been testing five pieces of brake hardware per train car and swapping some out. As for the doors, technicians were making adjustments to make sure they close correctly and that sensors note obstructions.

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Alstom CEO Henri Poupart-Lafarge said most of the 34 train vehicles have now been retrofitted.

Asked whether the issues had come up in its other Citadis models, Poupart-Lafarge said "every train is different and therefore these problems are unique to this type of vehicle."



6/30/22, 7:11 AM

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"It's not unusual to get to issues when we start to test the trains," Poupart-Lafarge added.

For its part, RTG said it is tracking Alstom's progress and will not yet commit to a precise handover date in August. It was obligated to set one back on May 31, but hasn't.

"We've given some dates in the past that we've not committed to. We don't want to disappoint again," said RTG's Lauch.



The Alstom trains are still not defect-free but the French manufacturer is now promising they will be complete by July 7. (City of Ottawa)

Back in February, for instance, Lauch assured councillors the system would hit a March 31 deadline, but it came and went.

"When I gave that date, at that time, I was confident," he said Tuesday.



6/30/22, 7:11 AM

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"It wasn't something that I just dreamt up," Lauch added, saying circumstances beyond the company's control arose shortly after.

RTG has also missed formal deadlines on May 24 and Nov. 2 in 2018, as well as another, non-contractual target of June 30.



Geoff Smith, CEO of Ellis Don, and Roman Garrido Sanchez of Dragados also took part in the mayor's meeting on June. 19. Both companies are part of the Rideau Transit Group consortium. (Kate Porter/CBC)

"We don't want a fifth missed date. That would be completely unacceptable," said Watson.

"They get it that this is their time to perform and we have great expectations that they will live up to these dates."

Watson also stressed that once the consortium sets the specific handover date, if it fails to meet that deadline, it would face another \$1 million penalty.

RTG had earlier submitted paperwork, believing it was finished construction and hoping to trigger its first payment in months, but both the city and an independent certifier disagreed, and sent the consortium back to do more work.

*With files from Kimberley Molina*

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