

Residents, businesses breathe sigh of relief over Belfast Road reopening

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Finally.

That's the reaction by Overbrook and Eastway Gardens residents to the reopening of Belfast Road on Dec. 18 after an 18-month wait, but five months ahead of schedule since it was originally slated to reopen in May 2016.

"I'm personally ecstatic," said Rawlson King, president of the Overbrook Community Association "We're very pleased because it basically reopens an important link to the Trainyards shopping district.

The road was closed for the construction of an underground light-rail line from the Belfast and Tremblay intersection to the Belfast maintenance yard where the light-rail trains will be maintained and sheltered nightly once the east-west Confederation LRT is up and running.

"We've had to put up with a lot of pain ... with the bridge being shut down because everybody would have to detour."

With the road's closure in May 2014, residents living to the north of the Belfast Road overpass over Highway 417, which linked to Coventry Road in Overbrook, were forced to drive the long way around, heading south on the Vanier Parkway and cutting across via Industrial Avenue.

"Basically, it adds a lot of time to the trip, and it also put a lot of pressure on businesses in the Trainyards because it wasn't as easy to access the Trainyards," King said.

"A lot of people stopped going and as a result some businesses did suffer."

The news was also welcome by Mike Ayoub, who has co-owned the White Horse Restaurant in Eastway Gardens with his wife, Rachel, for the past 17 years.

"I felt like singing and dancing the rest of the day," he said.

The restaurant, located at the corner of Belfast and Tremblay, had been caught in the middle of the LRT construction.

"It was the most stressful two years," said Ayoub, adding that his staff hours had to be cut because business was impacted.

Now the couple is anxiously waiting to see if and when business picks back up again.

"All we can do is hope," said Ayoub.

"Maybe to get them back is going to take a while – to get back all the customers that we had," Rachel Ayoub added.

City officials, including Mayor Jim Watson and Alta Vista Coun. Jean Cloutier, joined Antonio Estrada, chief executive of the Rideau Transit Group, along with a few local residents and project leads for a low-key ribbon cutting at the corner of Belfast and Tremblay roads on Dec. 17, the day before Belfast officially reopened.

Stephane Robert, senior engineer in the city's rail implementation office, said the road's early reopening can be attributed to the unseasonably warm winter, allowing paving and street-line painting to be completed in a timely manner.

The scope of the construction project was massive, with workers digging nine metres down to create an underground rail tunnel that forks east and west below the intersection. The new LRT connection also had to be constructed under a Via Rail line in the area.

"They had a big water main they had to put it under the tunnel, under the split," Robert said. "So this was a lot of work."

Tracks inside the tunnel will be laid beginning in January, eventually connecting to the east LRT line that will link to Blair Station and a westerly connector that will hook up the line that continues on to a stop at Tremblay Station.

The reopening of Belfast also marks the unveiling of a new paved multi-use pathway that runs along the west side of the road.



Mayor Jim Watson, Antonio Estrada, chief executive of the Rideau Transit Group, to the right of the mayor, and Alta Vista Coun. Jean Cloutier join project leaders and local residents to mark the official reopening of Belfast Road during a low-key ceremony at the corner of Belfast and Tremblay roads on Dec. 17, the day before the route was to open to motorists.



Mike Ayoub and his wife Rachel work in the kitchen of their White Horse Restaurant in the Eastway Gardens community on Dec. 17, the day officials celebrated the reopening of the nearby Belfast Road. The Ayoub's hope business will return to normal with the reopening of the road.

“It’s easy to get to the Adàwe Crossing,” Cloutier said, referencing a newly opened pedestrian and cycling bridge over the Rideau River that links Donald Street and Somerset Street East.

“The community has put up with a lot of disruption with this construction,” he added. “It’s just the light at the end of the tunnel for the community.”