
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION: STRATEGIC ADVANCEMENT OF HIGHWAY 17

PROSPERITY THROUGH CONNECTIVITY

Purpose

Provincial support for a phased Highway 17 improvement strategy between Renfrew and Deep River to convert high-risk intersections into interchanges/roundabouts and add passing capacity to improve safety, reduce closure-related delays, and maintain the movement of goods along this critical trade corridor.

Highway 17 is no longer simply a regional transportation corridor. It is a corridor of provincial significance supporting national defence, nuclear research, critical minerals development, forestry, manufacturing, tourism, and trade. As Ontario advances investments in the Ring of Fire, nuclear energy, housing growth, and economic competitiveness, Highway 17 will play an increasingly important role connecting northern resources, eastern Ontario industries, and national markets. The question is not whether demand for the corridor will grow. It is whether infrastructure improvements will keep pace with that growth.

Our Vision

At its core, this proposal is about connection. Highway 17 and Highway 417 are lifelines for communities, industries, families, and resources throughout Eastern Ontario. Highway 17/417 connects local communities and Provincial resources to national markets, providing the transportation reliability needed for economic growth, public safety, and long-term prosperity for the Province of Ontario.

Our proposal is simple but transformative:

1. **Adopt a phased improvement strategy for Highway 17** 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.
2. **Add projects under this phased strategy into the Province's priorities** to be completed.
3. **Identify projects under this strategy as of National Significance** and collaborate with the Federal government to accelerate their completion.

This is not just about roads, it is about building the pathway to prosperity and ensuring the safety of everyone who relies on this vital connection.

Why This Matters / Why Now

The commitment to extend Highway 417 to west of Bruce Street is exciting progress and a tremendous step forward for our County and the Province. This momentum should now be leveraged as the foundation for the next stage of corridor planning: improving Highway 17 northward so that safety, reliability, and goods movement continue beyond the current extension limits. Delays from closures and congestion already have a significant and growing impact on residents, employers, emergency services, and regional trade.

With rail services discontinued since 2010 and recent disruptions in border trade routes, the Highway 17/417 corridor is the backbone of Eastern Ontario's economy. The Premier's commitment to develop Ontario's 'Ring of Fire', for rare earth minerals, will further rely on this corridor to transport goods to the Port of Montreal. Industries such as Garrison Petawawa and Canadian Nuclear Laboratories also rely on this highway to sustain operations and fuel growth.

In 2024, 24 collisions were recorded on Highway 17 between Renfrew and Deep River. While this represents 1.5% of all recorded collisions throughout the County of Renfrew, the corridor's impact is greater than the raw percentage suggests as incidents on this rural two-lane highway require full closure and disproportionately affect regional mobility, emergency response, commuter travel, and goods movement. Figure 1 illustrates that collision activity is concentrated at intersections; highlighting these intersections has hot spots for collisions and significant economic deterrents.

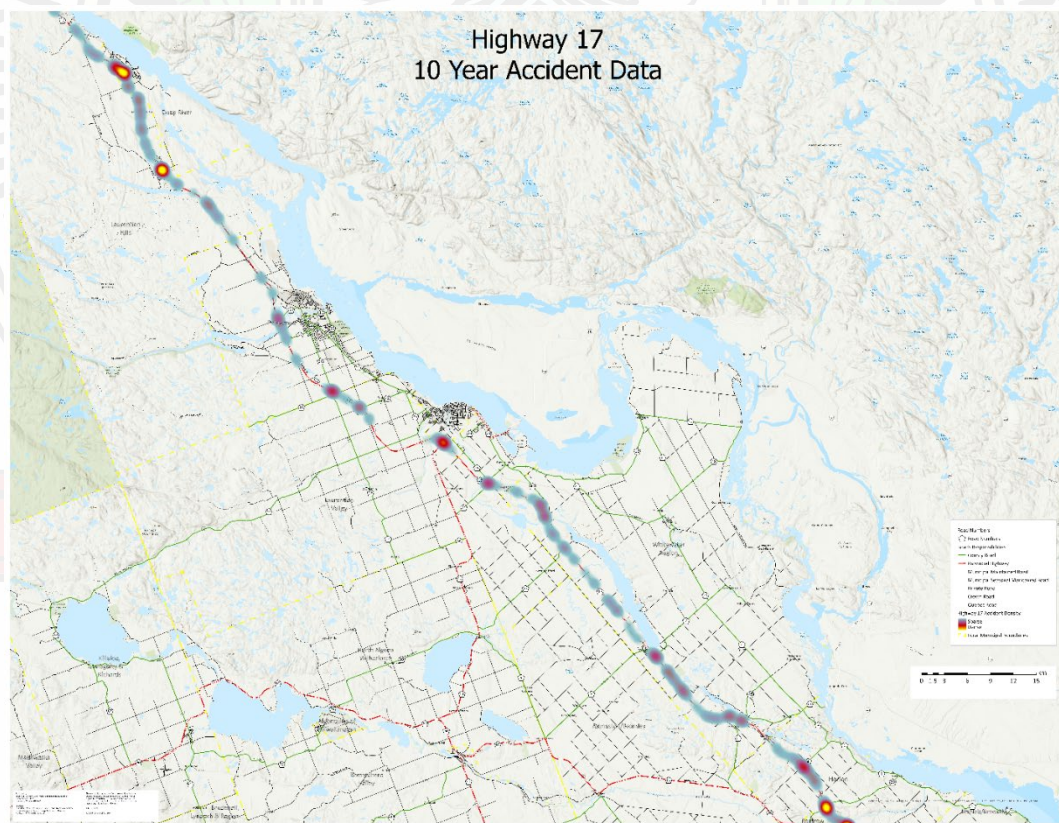


Figure 1: Heat Map of accidents on Highway 17 over the last 10 years.

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.

Highway 17 is the main access and supply route for major industries within the County of Renfrew, such as Garrison Petawawa and Canadian Nuclear Laboratories. These two particular industries are expanding their transport needs and rely heavily on this Highway to do so. However, Highway 17/417, as part of the Trans-Canada Highway, is also the primary route connecting Eastern Ontario to the rest of the Province, and the Country.

With rail service discontinuing in 2010 within the County of Renfrew, 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 Province. The Highway facilitates the effective transport of people, goods, and services to and from key destinations such as the James Bay Low Lands, City of North Bay, City of Ottawa, Greater Toronto Area, and City of Montréal, making this corridor extremely valuable.

The Chalk River and Deep River corridor is emerging as one of Canada's most important centres for nuclear research, innovation, isotope production, and next-generation reactor development. Ensuring reliable and resilient transportation access to this nationally significant cluster is essential to Ontario's long-term energy, security, and economic objectives. 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 Mark 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 Doug Ford, who stated: *"We're building Ontario's economy by investing more than \$200 billion in roads, highways, transit, and other infrastructure projects."* 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."*

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. In comparison, the section of Highway 17 from Bruce Street to Ridge Road is only 100 kilometres and, according to the Ministry of Transportation's 2021 traffic counts, has higher average traffic volumes ranging from 7,050 to 10,000 vehicles per day.

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. There are eleven (11) traffic signals within this 100-kilometre stretch of Highway and only 19% of the length includes passing lanes in one direction or the other.

A Sustainable Path Forward

We understand the complexities of highway expansion, but we also know that meaningful progress begins with bold steps. A phased approach to strategically address these challenges will improve safety and the flow of goods now while being able to sustainably accommodate growth and Highway expansion in the future in mind. An effective and worthwhile investment for the provincial economy. We would be excited by the opportunity to collaborate and provide our expertise to efficiently complete the following proposed next steps:

- 1. Prioritize Areas for Enhancement**

Review collision data from last 5-10 years, as well as the causes, to confirm hot spot locations for accidents. Identify high collision areas which also have relatively larger delay if closure should be required – detour is longer or a much lower level of service. Prioritize projects for intersection enhancements and/or passing lane integration based on frequency of accidents, level of risk of accidents, and traffic impacts.

- 2. Preliminary Designs**

Procure Consultant Services to undertake traffic studies, modelling, and develop preliminary designs based on prioritized areas which will recommend the most beneficial design alternative(s) and provide cost estimates. Where possible, group intersections and/or passing lane areas for preliminary designs for cost efficiencies. Ensure there are multiple preliminary designs progressing each year to ensure phased construction is achievable.

- 3. Develop Phasing Plan**

As preliminary designs are completed, and preferred alternatives confirmed, incorporate them into a ‘flexible’ phasing plan to prioritize projects to be carried into detailed design.

- 4. Detailed Designs**

Through Consultant Services, coordinate completion of detailed design and specifications for projects highest on the phasing plan/prioritization list. To ensure planning and phasing for construction is not hindered, it would be best to coordinate multiple detailed designs each year.

- 5. Intersection and Passing Lane Construction**

As detailed designs are completed, plan and implement construction contracts with local Contractors.

Designed and built for immediate positive outcomes as well as future expansion, these measures would not just be interim solutions – they are foundational investments in the transport of good to or from northern Ontario, the future expansion of Highway 17, and the safety of everyone who relies on this corridor.

A Proven Approach

A similarly strategic approach was already implemented by the Province on Highway 17, at the intersection with County Roads 54 (McLean Drive) and 508 (Calabogie Road). Though expansion of Highway 17 is planned for the near future in this area, it has not yet proceeded. However, this once four-way intersection had significant traffic congestion issues resulting in frequent collisions and further traffic delays. In order to improve this, the intersection was converted into an interchange designed and constructed to accommodate the upcoming Highway 17 expansion, which has been operational since 2023.

The Ministry of Transportation has hired a consulting firm to complete a traffic study and preliminary design for the intersection of Highway 17 with County Road 4 (Storyland Road). The preliminary design is reviewing intersection improvement alternatives such as signalization, highway roundabout, and an interchange. If carried forward to detailed design and eventual construction this could be the exact strategy the County of Renfrew is proposing for use at all major intersections with Highway 17.

The case for extending Highway 417 to Bruce Street is already well established and continues to grow. Continued improvement of Highway 17 across Renfrew County is equally important to address safety concerns, support economic growth, and strengthen the reliability of this critical corridor.

Final Thoughts

The next phase of prosperity in Eastern Ontario depends on more than attracting investment. It depends on ensuring people, goods, services, and resources can move safely and reliably. Highway 17 is the transportation spine that connects Garrison Petawawa, Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, northern resource development, manufacturing, forestry, and local communities to the rest of Ontario and beyond.

As the Province advances its ambitions for critical minerals, energy security, economic growth, and trade competitiveness, this corridor will become increasingly important. A phased strategy to improve Highway 17 is not simply a transportation project. It is an investment in Ontario's economy, national defence, energy future, and long-term competitiveness.

The opportunity before us is to build on the momentum of the Highway 417 extension and ensure this corridor is ready to support the next generation of growth.