

First segment of high-speed rail project to connect Montreal and Ottawa

MAURA FORREST
The Canadian Press

The first segment of the federal government's proposed high-speed rail project will connect Montreal and Ottawa, the transport minister announced Friday.

Steven MacKinnon said connecting Ontario and Quebec was the “logical” first step for the planned 1,000-kilometre rail network, which would see trains travelling between Toronto and Quebec City at speeds of up to 300 kilometres per hour. Construction is expected to begin in 2029.

“This segment represents a unique opportunity to connect

two provinces and quickly generate benefits for travellers, communities, and the economy,” MacKinnon told reporters at a press conference in Gatineau, Que.

The high-speed rail project was first announced by then-prime minister Justin Trudeau in February. If completed, it could take passengers from Toronto to Montreal in less than three hours. The trip from Ottawa to Montreal is estimated to take slightly less than an hour.

Prime Minister Mark Carney announced in September that the government's new major projects office would speed up engineering and regulatory

work on the railroad to get construction underway within four years.

MacKinnon said the roughly 200-kilometre stretch between Montreal and Ottawa is “relatively short and straight,” and will allow teams in both provinces to start building the expertise needed for the rest of the project. It would include a stop in Laval, Que., an off-island suburb north of Montreal.

Subsequent legs would extend west to Peterborough, Ont. and Toronto, and east to Trois-Rivières, Que. and Quebec City.

The exact route of the rail line has not yet been deter-

mined. Alto, the Crown corporation responsible for the project, will launch a three-month consultation process in January 2026, MacKinnon said.

“We are talking about a generational investment that will shape the Canadian economy for decades to come and will create lasting benefits,” he said, citing estimates that the project could create more than 50,000 jobs during construction and contribute up to \$35 billion to Canada's GDP.

Alto CEO Martin Imbleau declined to say how much the first segment might cost. The corporation estimates the whole project could cost \$60 billion to \$90 billion.

The federal government has not made a final decision approving funding for the entire rail line. In February, Trudeau announced that Ottawa had awarded a \$3.9-billion contract to a consortium called Cadence to design the project.

In a statement Friday, Conservative transport critic Dan Albas said the high-speed project “is not proceeding at anything resembling high speed.”

“Today the Liberals are giving themselves a blank cheque for a taxpayer-backed rail line with no price tag that will only benefit Liberal insiders,” he said.

Market Watch

S&P/TSX 31,527.39 -133.34	S&P 500 6,827.41 -73.59	DOW 48,458.05 -245.96	NASDAQ 23,195.17 -398.69	DOLLAR 72.63¢US +0.03¢	OIL per barrel US\$57.44 -\$0.16	GOLD US\$4,328.30 \$15.30
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WestJet pauses move to install non-reclining seats after blowback

CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS
The Canadian Press

WestJet has paused a move to install non-reclining seats on a big slice of its fleet after pushback from employees and passengers.

The airline announced in September it would reconfigure the seating on 43 Boeing 737 jets to install an extra row and divide the cabin into several tiers, some with more space — and pricier tickets — than others.

Many of the economy seats would have less legroom than the previous layout and feature what WestJet called a “fixed recline design,” meaning they could not be tilted back.

In an internal memo obtained by The Canadian Press, WestJet vice-president Robert Antoniuk told staff that the new configuration will only go ahead on 22 planes “for the time being,” with 21 of those already sporting the tighter interior.

In the meantime, the Calgary-based company will conduct a review and “continue to gather feedback from guests and employees,” he said in the message Tuesday.

The notion that passengers would have to pay for a reclining seat — or else occupy a static one with less space — generated some blowback from passengers as well as flight attendants over the past few months.

In a bulletin to members, the union pointed to reduced leg room “comparable to ultra-low-cost carriers like Spirit, Wizz Air and Frontier.” It said the more cramped conditions made it harder for guests with “varying mobility,” car seats and pets, on top of limited overhead bin space “despite an increase in guest capacity,” according to the August update from the WestJet contingent of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The change would raise the risk of “guest frustration” and result in less rest for crew members who would have more difficulty sleeping on board while commuting to an upcoming shift, the union said.

WestJet's decision to hit the brakes on its plan comes a few weeks after representatives from the flight attendants' and pilots' unions travelled with company executives in the cheap seats of a scheduled flight from Toronto to Calgary “to gather a shared understanding of the product, the space and the experience,” Antoniuk said in the memo.

The pause takes effect right as the holiday travel rush kicks off, with every aircraft in the 189-plane fleet needed for service.

WestJet said in an email it may resume the seat reconfiguration in the spring.

“Throughout this winter, we will also be monitoring guest



CP PHOTO JEFF MCINTOSH

A WestJet plane on the tarmac at Yellowknife Airport on July 22.

feedback and assessing the operational performance of the reconfigured aircraft to learn more about how this product is performing in the market,” said spokeswoman Julia Brunet.

In September, the airline announced it would create multiple seating tiers on the 43 jets, which included planes from former subsidiary Swoop Airlines, the newly integrated Sunwing Airlines and the now-defunct Lynx Air. Most of those cabins had no premium economy seats.

The plan was to install a dozen premium seats and 36 more so-called extended comfort seats that would include more space and higher prices, as well as more than 100 seats with less leg room.

“The layout for our refreshed cabin caters to our guests' diverse preferences. Whether they opt for premium seating with extra amenities and legroom or for more affordable ticket prices with less space, we're excited to

introduce this range of products for our guests to enjoy,” said chief experience officer Samantha Taylor in a news release at the time.

Some others took a more skeptical view.

“If you're anything over five-foot-ten, your knees are under your chin,” said John Gradek, who teaches aviation management at McGill University.

“They're dense-ing up the airplane.”

The altered layout fits into a broader pattern across the industry whereby economy-class trips are defined by shrinking legroom, narrower cushion space and, especially, myriad fees as airlines increasingly offer top-up options on their tickets.

The extra money passengers pay for checked bags, pre-selected seats and onboard snacks makes up a growing share of airline revenue, raising questions of whether the charges amount to “junk fees” or the lower base price offers greater choice for travellers.

Popularized by budget carriers more than 15 years ago and now being adopted by larger players, so-called ancillary revenue plays an increasingly critical role in the industry, helping to diversify income and insulate companies from fluctuations in fare prices, fuel costs and competition.

Last year, WestJet introduced its new “extended comfort” service tier where economy-class passengers can pay for more legroom, early access to overhead bins and a free alcoholic drink.

“It's a way of getting people to opt for those more expensive seats. You simply make the comfort differential greater,” said Barry Prentice, who heads the University of Manitoba's transport institute.

“For some people who really don't have the money, they may appreciate the option of, ‘I'll just travel with the bare bones,’” he added, referring to non-reclining seats, which comprise the bulk of the cabin on the 22 revamped WestJet planes.

PUBLIC NOTICES

8AM - 4PM SPECIAL SERVICES

Electric Outages.....	403.529.8260
Gas Emergency.....	403.529.8191
Water & Sewer Emergency	403.502.8042
After Hours Special Services	403.526.2828

DEVELOPMENT PERMITS APPROVED
DECEMBER 4 TO DECEMBER 10 2025

RESIDENTIAL

36 SIERRA ROAD SW - Single Detached House With Site Coverage Variance.

526 8 STREET SE - Single Detached House Addition (Carport).

172 HAMPTONS WAY SE - Detached Garage.

COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL/ INSTITUTIONAL

1120 1 STREET SW - Installation Of One Portable Sign.

1401 POWERHOUSE ROAD SW - Installation Of Portable Sign.

1538 32 STREET SW - Demolition.

135 CARRY DRIVE SE - Change Of Use To Daycare Facility.

HOME BUSINESS

548 B PRINCESS AVENUE SE - Home Business Minor - Landscaping

102 NORTHLANDS CRESCENT NE - Home Business Major - Alternative Healing/ Therapy.

1646 21 AVENUE SE - Home Business Minor - Landscaping.

85 ROSSMERE WAY SE Home Business Minor. Consultant (Refused. No application fee payment / Incomplete application)

What's Happening IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Scan code to view development notices online (updated weekly)

A person claiming to be affected by a decision of the Development Authority may appeal to the Medicine Hat Subdivision and Development Appeal Board by completing and submitting to the City Clerk Department, the required Notice of Appeal form within twenty one (21) days of this publication. Forms available from: City Clerk Dept., 3rd Floor, City Hall or City website: www.medicinehat.ca.

All Development Permits listed are subject to conditions. For more information, contact Planning and Development Services, 2nd Floor, City Hall. Ph. (403) 529-8374.

www.medicinehat.ca

Cannabis stocks surge after reports of U.S. President Donald Trump planning to ease federal restrictions

The Associated Press

Shares in Canada's cannabis companies surged after reports U.S. President Donald Trump is planning to ease federal restrictions on the drug.

The *Washington Post* first reported that the president is expected to direct agencies to reclassify marijuana as a Schedule III drug.

The move would make it

similar to some common prescription painkillers, the newspaper says.

A reclassification of the drug in the U.S. could offer an opportunity for Canadian cannabis companies to expand their businesses stateside.

Shares of Tilray Brands Inc. jumped 29 per cent or \$3.35 to \$14.94 in mid-morning trading Friday on the Toronto Stock

Exchange, while Canopy Growth Corp. shares were up 32 per cent or 49 cents at \$2.07. Aurora Cannabis Inc. shares were up 13 per cent and Organigram Global Inc. was up nearly 10 per cent.

While many states have passed laws legalizing cannabis for adult use in the U.S., federally it remains a Schedule I drug, the same category as heroin and LSD.

Bombardier wins \$753M contract to replace RCAF's Challengers

The Canadian Press

The federal government says it will purchase six Global 6500 jets to replace the Royal Canadian Air Force's remaining Challenger aircraft, which are used to shuttle around VIPs like the prime minister and Governor General.

The contract is expected to run \$753 million and also covers pilot training and maintenance.

Ottawa says the first of the new executive-style aircraft is expected to be delivered by summer 2027 and to be in the air by the end of that year.

The government says the new jets, which replace the last four Challenger aircraft, will be used for various operations, including medical evacuations and disaster relief.

The CC-144 Challenger series was introduced into

government service in the 1980s and use of the business jets has long been politically charged, with opposition parties frequently describing their use by government members as wasteful.

The airlift capability procurement is among the first files to be managed by the government's new Defence Investment Agency, which handles large military purchases.