

The Future of Transportation in Calgary

At a speech to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce on September 24, Mayor Dave Bronconnier offered his strong support for Premier Klein's proposal for a municipal infrastructure "Catch Up" program. The Premier's proposal would see a \$1 Billion investment in Calgary's municipal infrastructure over the next 5 years. The Mayor applauded the Klein Government - the Calgary Caucus specifically - for its commitment to helping our City address its massive transportation backlog.

From a sustainability perspective, Mayor Bronconnier noted that the Federal Government needs to be encouraged to "step up to the table" with significant financing. He said the signals from Ottawa are positive, but more work needs to be done to ensure that federal fuel tax sharing dollars start flowing in the next fiscal year.

The Mayor wasted little time in identifying priorities for these new revenue sources – transportation. Specifically, Mayor Bronconnier said that City Council needs to get moving to: fully extend the existing Light Rail Transit system, begin planning and budgeting for the construction of the Western Leg of the LRT, add more capacity to Transit by doubling the number of cars to 30 in the next order, and to begin adding more critical interchange projects to the Transportation Master Plan.

Delivered to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce September 24, 2004

"Ladies and Gentleman, thank you.

Well, some days when you wake up you just know it's going to be a good day. Today is one of those days.

Many of you probably read the paper this morning. Premier Klein announced a proposal to provide Alberta's municipalities with 3 Billion dollars over the next 5 years. That's a Billion dollars for Calgary's infrastructure. That is a tremendous announcement for our city.

This morning, I phoned the Premier to thank him personally. But I want to publicly thank him again. I want to thank his ministers – Guy Boutillier, Pat Nelson, Greg Melchin, Ed Stelmach - just to name a few.

Thanks also goes to Richard Magnus and the members of our Calgary caucus. They are demonstrating, in an enormous way, their dedication to our city. They deserve our congratulations and our applause!

Let's put this announcement into context and discuss where we have been as a City and where we are going.

In the last municipal election, Transportation was the most important issue. Guess what? It still is!

Three years ago, we had a huge transportation backlog. We had major projects "on-hold". They included LRT extensions in the north and south, and a host of road projects. Our fuel tax funding from the province was at real risk. Municipal transportation funding was not even on the federal government's radar screen.

Our prospects were bleak. Where are we today?

We moved forward and completed LRT extensions in the north and south. We bought 21 more LRT cars and added 10,000 more operating hours to Calgary Transit. We moved forward on a multitude of road projects. Interchanges on MacLeod Trail and Glenmore Trail and Crowchild Trail.

We approved and begun expanding capacity on the Glenmore Trail corridor, by building interchanges at Elbow Drive and 5th Street. It's a huge project worth \$100 Million. And it's a project that has been "on hold" for over 20 years.

Over the past three years, we've **invested** over \$600 Million for transportation infrastructure in Calgary. That's real progress, and it needs to continue.

That means upgrades for many of our major traffic corridors: Glenmore Trail, Crowchild Trail, John Laurie, 16th Avenue, McKnight Blvd, to name just a few. It includes upgrades to our bus and LRT fleet, and an extension of the LRT in the North East.

That's the good news. Here's the problem.

During the course of this municipal campaign, our transportation backlog will have grown by over \$8 Million. It grows a quarter of a million dollars each and every day. Without action, like the announcement from the province this morning, five years from now, that backlog would be almost \$1.5 Billion.

On our own, the City could never catch-up or keep pace. We've raised taxes and maxed out our credit card for transportation. We've gained ground, but we still have a very long way to go, and we need help!

The Province has indicated its support. It will be very helpful.

I spoke to our City Manager this morning, to bring forward a report to City Council identifying the most effective way to incorporate these new provincial dollars in addressing our most pressing transportation needs.

Our next challenge will be to address the issue of sustainability. And that means turning our sights on Prime Minister Martin and the Federal Government.

Believe me, after all the meetings and phone calls and letters to Ottawa, they know. The Prime Minister is beginning to think that "transportation" is the only word I know.

No one has ever accused me of being subtle. But that's ok, because I am very pleased to report to you today, we are making progress on that front too.

In Toronto last week, the Mayor's from Canada's ten largest cities met. We agreed on a set of principles and a formula for the federal government to share Fuel Tax revenues with municipalities, through their provincial governments. We are committed to seeing this through.

Premier Klein is also committed. He wants Alberta to be one of the first provinces to sign up for The New Deal.

We are getting the right signals from Ottawa. Just this week, Finance Minister Ralph Goodale spoke here at the Chamber of Commerce. He confirmed the federal government's commitment to cities.

He said specifically:

- They want to reach agreements with the provinces before the end of this year.
- They want the dollars to start flowing in the next fiscal year.
- And, they want to ramp up the program over 5 years so that municipalities will get 5 cents per litre of gas as sustainable and permanent funding.

That is very positive. Depending on the formula, and the volumes of fuel Calgary's share of these revenues could be as high as \$300 to \$500 Million over the next 5 years.

With a lot of hard work over the last 3 years, the Provincial support is on the way, the Federal support is getting closer, and we need to get that deal done.

When that money starts flowing, I want our City Council to make a commitment too. We need to direct these new dollars toward transportation infrastructure. What can we accomplish with this new investment? A lot.

We can build out our existing LRT lines. Look at the Northwest. We are gradually extending our LRT westward. The Province is building the Stony Trail ring-road.

Why wouldn't we connect the two? Why not take our LRT line run it all the way up to Rocky ridge to have it link up past the ring-road? It's worth about \$300 Million for the whole project, but it also offers a significant benefit.

We have 150,000 people in the Northwest who are beyond that LRT catchment area. We need take our system out to reach those Calgarians too.

What else can we accomplish?

We could advance the planning and construction of the West leg of the LRT. Bow Trail is one of the most congested roads in the City. Adding more lanes to Bow Trail is going to help, but only for the short-term. A west leg of the LRT is part of a long-term solution. With the backlog of projects, the City hasn't even reviewed the plans on this since the 1980s. It's time to update the plans, determine the budget, dedicate the dollars and build it.

We need to give commuters in the west more choices. A new LRT line will ease much of Bow Trail's congestion, and it will get people downtown faster.

The most important transit investment we can make is adding capacity to our system. Over the past 10 years, ridership on our LRT has doubled. Our capacity at rush-hour however has only increased by a third. You don't have to be a NASA scientist to see the problem with this equation.

Transit needs more capacity. We need to buy more LRT cars and more buses. Instead of buying 14 new LRT cars with our next order, we should be buying 30. It would cost about \$110 Million, but it would increase our LRT capacity by 30%. It would be like adding 4 free-flow lanes of road from new communities to downtown.

That means there will be fewer cars on the street at rush-hour, and there will be **more** trains and **more** buses, **more** often.

People shouldn't be crammed into LRT cars like sardines. They shouldn't have to wait at their stop for the next bus or next LRT because it's too full. If we want Calgarians to use transit, it must be safe, affordable and convenient. We need to commit ourselves to meeting that goal. We need to give people a real choice.

But it's not just about Transit. It's **also** about critical road projects, specifically interchanges.

We have over a half billion dollars worth of unfunded interchanges which need to be built, but won't be, without those new federal and provincial dollars.

Think about the impact on our transportation corridors if we get started on building these interchanges.

We've got:

- Macleod Trail and Lake Fraser Gate. That's \$17 Million.
- Macleod Trail and 162nd Avenue. Worth \$25 Million.
- Macleod Trail and Heritage Drive. Worth \$35 Million.
- Country Hills Boulevard at Beddington Boulevard. That's \$21 Million.
- The TransCanada Highway at Bowfort Road. Worth \$34 Million.
- McKnight Boulevard and Barlow Trail. That's \$25 Million.
- And McKnight Boulevard and 19th and 12th Streets. Two interchanges worth \$15 Million each.

That's almost \$190 Million worth of interchange projects, and that's not even half of the ones we need.

New interchange projects should be one of the priorities for new federal and provincial infrastructure dollars.

Some people have said, "You spend too much time worrying about transportation, What about issues like the environment, economic development and quality of life?"

This City Council has a strong record on all of those issues.

We've put more money toward parks, affordable housing, and other key city amenities. And, more importantly, let's not forget, transportation is **not just** transportation. It's the environment.

Our new Glenmore Trail-Elbow Drive interchange is expected to save 1200 tonnes of fuel each year because cars won't be idling at lights. Less smog, less greenhouse gasses, a cleaner environment.

Transportation is also economic development. Calgary is Canada's western transportation and logistics hub. It's one of our fastest growing sectors. It employs over 40,000 Calgarians directly.

An efficient transportation network means Calgary's economy continues to grow. It means more jobs and more prosperity.

Transportation is also about quality of life.

Just ask the resident from Riverbend who wrote me after we completed the interchange at Glenmore and 18th Street. She was thrilled.

The City gave her 15 minutes of her life back every working day. That's an hour and fifteen minutes a week - over sixty hours a year. That's time she gets to spend with her family, instead of spending it in her car stuck in traffic trying to turn.

That's one person. Nearly 7,000 families live in Riverbend-Ogden. That translates into over a half-million hours of "your time" we gave back to people in those communities.

Transportation is more than just concrete and pavement. It's about people and giving them back their time. That's real quality of life. We have good reason to be optimistic about the future of our city. We have worked very hard. And we are making real progress.

The Province has come to the table in a very big way. Ottawa is moving in the right direction, and we need to encourage them to "step on the gas".

And as the dollars begin to flow, City Council needs to be dedicated and disciplined in our approach. We need to be responsible by addressing Calgarians' priorities.

That means completing our existing LRT, expanding the system, and adding more capacity. It means adding new critical interchange and road projects.

Ladies and gentlemen, political campaigns are about ideas and priorities. They are about seeking mandates. Over the past 3 years as Mayor, I have worked hard to get results on your priorities. On October 18th, I'm seeking a mandate to make these proposals a reality. I hope I can count on your support.

Thank you.