



Towards a Provincial Transit Strategy

Prepared by: Alberta Urban
Municipalities Association

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Towards a Provincial Transit Strategy: An Outline

1. Introduction

Alberta's ongoing economic, social and environmental sustainability requires strategic renewal and expansion of public transportation. Without affordable, energy efficient, and attractive transportation options, Alberta will not be able to enhance the quality of life it offers its citizens or maintain its global competitive advantage.

The Government of Alberta has released a new Land Use Framework, a renewed Climate Change Action Plan and a 20 Year Strategic Capital Plan. It is also currently developing a Clean Air Strategy and Energy Strategy. Transit plays a role in each of these strategies. Still, it represents too huge an endeavour to only be one action item of many in a broader strategy. Edmonton alone has identified the need for a \$7.7 billion infrastructure investment over the next 10 years just for light rail transit (LRT). A stand alone transit strategy which is interconnected with other initiatives is needed to deal with the enormous financial demands and planning complexities involved in providing efficient, accessible transportation for Alberta citizens.

AUMA proposes the Government of Alberta engage the Association and its members along with other stakeholders in developing a Provincial Transit Strategy. The first priority of the strategy should be to establish a program to support the expansion of LRT in the Province's two metro regions. AUMA's member endorsed policy paper *Towards A Light Rail Transit Program* is attached as Appendix "A". Other priorities include further developing regional transit systems and creating interregional and intercity connections. Smaller urban transit systems will also need to be expanded and enhanced. AUMA will begin looking at these priorities more closely in the upcoming year.

The following presents a high level outline of the vision, mission, goals and principles for the proposed Strategy. It also begins to identify, roles responsibilities and initial priorities. AUMA will be doing more work to indentify the practical issues which need to be addressed by a Strategy including, utility corridors, right of ways, intermodal connections and integrated fare structures. It does not at this point attempt to set out specific targets or detailed costs. Collaborative research and discussion is required before specific numbers can be introduced to the Strategy.

2. Vision

Alberta has a Provincial Transit Strategy which establishes the Province and its municipalities as national leaders in the provision of sustainable public transit.

3. Mission

The Provincial Transit Strategy sets out the policy framework and financial commitments necessary to support the maintenance, expansion and coordination of transit systems in Alberta.

4. Goals

The ultimate aim of the strategy is to decrease Albertans' reliance on automobile travel and shift mobility towards public transit along with other transportation alternatives such as walking and cycling.

5. Principles

The Provincial Transit Strategy will be:

- a. Developed in accordance with the principles of Municipal Sustainability Planning, balancing economic, environmental, social, cultural and governance considerations as described in the following section.
- b. Operationalized in accordance with long term local, regional and provincial integrated transportation and land use plans.
 - i. These plans should promote transit oriented development (TOD), increased population and employment densities near transit hubs, in order to enhance the economic and environment viability of public transit and meet the objectives of the Province's Land Use Framework.
 - ii. Through transportation and land use plans, public transit will be coordinated with other transportation modes.
- c. Funded through a combination of user fees and long term predictable municipal, provincial and federal funding.
 - i. To align with the principles above and efforts towards a national transit strategy made by the Federation of Municipalities Big City Mayor's Caucus, transit funding from the provincial and federal governments should only be made available to urban centres that "have a council approved integrated land use and transportation plan that favour transit as the primary means for accommodating future growth in travel demand."¹
- d. Supportive of existing regional transit initiatives including work being done by the Capital Region Board and the Calgary Regional Partnership.

6. Transit and Municipal Sustainability

As stated, the development of a Provincial Transit Strategy will be guided by the principles of economic, environmental, social, cultural and governance

¹ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Big Cities Mayors' Caucus, 2007, National Transit Strategy, p.16.

sustainability. Sustainability is “living in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission, 1987). Sustainability both drives the need for a transit strategy and provides the framework to guide its development.

a. Economic

Efficient transportation systems

Alberta’s tremendous economic and population growth has come with escalating congestion, increasing the time it takes to transport people and goods. In 2006 Transportation Canada estimated that congestion cost the economy \$2.3billion to \$3.7billion annually.²

Alberta’s 20 year strategic capital plan estimates that Alberta’s population will reach 5 million people by 2028, an increase of 40 percent above 2007 values. Much of this increase is set to occur in urban centres.³ Population growth will only exacerbate congestion unless fast, reliable alternative modes of transportation can be provided. When the costs of congestion are considered the billions of dollars that are required for transit systems and LRT in particular appear to be wise investments in the future function of Alberta’s urban centres.

Effective Land Use

Low density development has increased the cost of providing public utilities whether it is transit, roads, water delivery or policing. Compact, mixed use transit oriented development will provide the population densities needed to make the delivery of transit more efficient and decrease the cost of other services on a per capita basis. The Province’s draft Land Use Framework is making it a priority for the Capital and Calgary regions to develop plans that support “higher-density infill development across the region which preserves the natural environment, conserves agricultural land and makes more efficient use of existing infrastructure.”⁴ Communities throughout the province, regardless of size can benefit from this approach to planning. In fact the concept of creating compact communities that contain a variety of easily accessible amenities is often dubbed as “urban village” design.

Savings for Government

In addition to the cost savings derived from changing land use patterns, investments in public transportation can be offset by savings in other areas of transportation. For example the City of Calgary estimates that if it did not have LRT to transport people

² Transport Canada, 2006, *The Cost of Urban Congestion*, p. i.

³ Government of Alberta, 2008, *Alberta’s 20 Year Capital Plan*, p. 21.

⁴ Government of Alberta, 2008, *Draft Land-use Framework*, p.24.

down town during peak hours it would have to build approximately eleven extra lanes of traffic. Reducing car trips will also reduce road wear and the related cost of maintenance

Savings for Individuals

Most Geologists and Economists agree that the world has reached Peak Oil. Albertans are already experiencing the effects of increased fuel prices. According to Statistics Canada Gasoline prices rose 11.6% between April 2007 and April 2008.⁵ This trend is only going to deepen in years to come.

Increased transit and transit oriented development could help steady cost of mobility, making it more affordable for individuals to access civic, educational, employment and, recreational opportunities. It is estimated that housing located close to transit, shopping, schools and employment, reducing vehicle ownership and can save households \$2,000 - \$5,000 annually.⁶

Global Competition for Business and Labour

All of the above speak to the cost of living and doing business in any urban centre and are therefore key factors in any urban municipality's success in the global competition for business and labour. Almost every world class city has some form of LRT that is linked in with road, rail and even air travel. Public Transit's role in determining a municipality's competitive advantage is illustrated by a Toronto Board of Trade Survey which identifies gridlock as the top priority of Toronto's largest corporations.⁷

In its 20 year Capital Strategic Plan the Government of Alberta indicates that it has decided to "plan for high growth and be ready to meet the demands of that high growth"⁸. Success will depend on an effective strategy to transport the products and people needed to drive that growth.

b. Environment

Climate Change

Road transportation is one of the largest single sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada, accounting for 18% percent of total emissions.^{9,10} Therefore, increasing transit ridership should be a top priority in any action towards combating climate change. A key driver of the Government of British Columbia's \$14 billion dollar public transit plan is to

⁵ Statistics Canada, 2008, *Latest release from the Consumer Price Index*, Wednesday, May 21st, 2008.

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/Subjects/Cpi/cpi-en.htm>

⁶ Litman, Todd, Victoria Transit Policy Institute, *Cities Connect :How Urbanity Helps Achieve Social Inclusion Objective*.p.7.

⁷ FCM, 2007, *Backgrounder: Transit's Contribution to Global Competiveness*.

⁸ Government of Alberta, 2008, *Alberta's 20-Year Strategic Capital Plan*, p. 19

⁹ Environment Canada, 2008, *National Inventory Report 1990-2006*, p. 471

¹⁰ Environment Canada, *Canada's 2006 Greenhouse Gas Inventory*http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/ghg/inventory_report/2006/tab_eng.cfm

reduce GHG emissions and other air contaminants from cars by 4.7 million tonnes cumulatively by 2020. British Columbia's plan to reduce emissions does not only rely on shifting mobility from automobiles to public transit, but also on making transit operations more efficient. The plan includes upgrading bus fleets with clean energy busses and related infrastructure maintenance¹¹.

Alberta has the opportunity to meet and even surpass British Columbia's targets. Alberta can solidify its role as a leader in Canada in terms of taking concrete regulatory and program based actions against climate change by working with municipalities to expand transit's contribution to GHG reductions. Alberta municipalities are already establishing themselves as national leaders. Calgarians are able to "ride the wind" on renewable energy powered trains.. The Town of Banff became the first municipality in the country to launch an all-hybrid electric transit fleet. The Town's decision to invest extra dollars into environmentally friendly transit technology, will not only help to reduce emissions, but also visibly demonstrate Alberta's commitment to fighting Climate Change to Albertans and visitors from around the world. Implementing a transit strategy as a catalyst for further action would enable Alberta to establish a reputation as an environmental innovator.

Air Quality and Human Health

In addition to greenhouse gases automobiles release particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and carbon monoxide into the atmosphere. Health Canada estimates that air pollution caused 5,900 deaths in Canada's eight largest cities during 2005. ¹² The Department points out that reducing human health costs is just one of the many co-benefits of public transit. Investment in public transit is also an investment in public health.

c. Social

Health

Improving air quality is not Transit's only contribution to human health. Transit and transit oriented development (TOD) promotes walking whether to a transit station or directly to a destination. The World Health Organization encourages public policy makers to increase the walkability of communities as the number one way to increase physical activity and all the health benefits that come along with it. Even centres too small to have their own transit system can prioritize pedestrians and

¹¹ British Columbia, 2008, *Backgrounder: Comprehensive New Transit Plan Benefits Entire Province*, www.gov.ab.ca.

¹² Health Canada, 2005, Fact Sheet, *Health Benefits of Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions*

cyclists over automobiles in transportation planning in order to encourage people to leave their vehicles behind.

Social Engagement

Creating communities where civic, educational, employment, and recreational opportunities are easily accessible by transit and/or pedestrian and cycling connections will increase the social engagement of all citizens. As discussed in the economic section, transit and transit oriented development makes engaging in a wide range of activities more affordable. This is particularly important given Alberta's demographic trends. Alberta's 20 Year Capital Plan "By 2028, the percentage of Alberta's population over the age of 65 will double. At the same time, the number of children aged 0-17 will increase by 14 percent." Immigration will also continue to play a key role in meeting the demands of Alberta's labour market. Many individuals in these populations cannot drive or afford a vehicle. They rely on transit to meet basic needs from accessing health care to commuting to work.

Accessibility

Persons with disabilities are also playing a larger role in Alberta societies. More and more people with disabilities strive to take part in the labour force and participate in social activities. There is so much demand for accessible public transit that the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) has added a full day workshop to its annual conference. Workshop sessions are packed with representatives of the disabled communities and transit system operators looking for ways to improve services. Transit system operators are recognizing the value of increasing accessibility not just for persons with disabilities but to improve the quality of services to all passengers. As one presenter from the 2008 workshop pointed out "when you get it right for the accessibility community, you get it right for everyone"¹³

d. Culture

Automobile transportation is as much an expression of North American culture as it is a way to get from one place to another. The economic and environmental benefits of reducing auto transit will help to change some peoples' mobility choices. However, to realize a large scale modal shift towards transit will require a change in the way transit services are delivered and perceived. A number of speakers at the most recent CUTA Conference in Edmonton highlighted the importance of providing quality, reliable, competitive alternative transportation services.

¹³ Shaw, Amelia, CUTA Annual Conference, May 22, 2008, *Accessibility in North America*.

Increased ridership will be driven by factors that make transit more attractive (pull factors) and driving less attractive (push factors).

Pull factors include:

- Service frequency and coverage
- Reliability/travel time
- Connectivity
- Comfort and transit designs that maximize personal space

Putting these factors in place requires increasing funding towards improving service standards and greater planning and coordination to allow passengers to move seamlessly between municipalities and transit modes. Furthermore, the importance of speed and reliability is what makes LRT so important as the core of a Provincial Transit Strategy. Experience in Edmonton and Calgary and other cities demonstrates that LRT's speed comfort and reliability is able to attract auto users to use public transit in ways that bus only systems are unable to.¹⁴

Push factors discussed over various sessions at the conference include:

- Rising gas prices
- Congestion
- Disincentives on car use
 - Parking constraints and cost
 - Congestion fees
 - Road tolls
 - Taxes on vehicles

Gas prices and congestion are rising on their own, but political will is required to put in place financial disincentives.

e. Governance

Strong Leadership is central to the success of transit policy. Not only does the behaviour of individuals need to change, but methods that have gone into land use and transportation planning need to be revamped. For years urban planning has revolved around multilane freeways and wide intersections unfriendly to pedestrians, cyclists and transit. As David Colquhoun from Plan It Calgary presented, urban municipalities are starting to change the framework which guides decision making to one which prioritizes alternative mobility choices, walking, cycling and transit, making it easier for people to reach their destination without using their car.¹⁵

Destinations often take people between municipalities. These people don't want to worry about whose jurisdiction they are going to, they

¹⁴ See Appendix "A", *AUMA Policy Paper, Towards a Light Rail Transit Program*, p.5.

¹⁵ Coquhoun, David, CUTA Annual Conference, May 22nd, 2008, *Smart Growth*.

just want to get there on time and with minimum effort. Providing seamless mobility between jurisdictions requires intermunicipal coordination. Under the Draft Provincial Land-use Framework regions will be established to work on region-wide transportation plans among other issues.

The Framework prioritizes planning in the Capital and Calgary regions and has directed regions to tackle transit as a top issue.

Planning in the Capital Region is already underway. A report on key infrastructure prepared for the Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan in 2007 sets out a concept for future regional transit services with LRT servicing as the backbone of the system and bus rapid transit services connecting outlying population. The Report stresses the need for a regional transit planning framework that has park and ride facilities at strategic points, high density housing available close to industrial sites and implementation of TOD throughout the region. A regional context also needs to be applied to filling the financial transit infrastructure gap with contributions from regional jurisdictions adding to commitments by the City, Province and Federal Government ¹⁶ Although the report was prepared for the Capital Region, its principles can be applied with modifications throughout the province.

Whether the issue is funding or planning road, transit and utility corridors there must be collaboration between municipalities and with other orders of government. Collaboration would be made easier with a Provincial Transit Strategy which sets out a funding commitment, guiding principles and objectives providing surety for all parties.

7. Measuring Success

The investment of tax payer dollars towards renewing transit infrastructure is necessarily great. Therefore, it is important that the impact of this investment is tracked and reported. The following chart outlines some potential measures of success. Exact targets and measurement methods will need to be established.

Measure	Target
Fewer/shorter car trips	Decrease in km travelled
Increased public transit mode share	Increased number of transit trips
Increased active transportation (walking, cycling) mode share	Increased number of walking and cycling trips
Improved transit fleet	Litres per kilometre

¹⁶ ISL Engineering and Land Services, 2007, *Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan Final Report on Core Infrastructure*,

efficiency	
Reduced GHG emissions	Tonne per passenger kilometre
Accessibility	Customer satisfaction and feedback
Increased densities	Population per hectare

8. Roles and Responsibilities

Each order of government has a role to play in a Provincial Transit Strategy. The AUMA also has a role to play in facilitating coordination between governments and helping municipalities find the products and information they will need to implement the Strategy.

a. Municipalities

Operation

- It is up to municipalities to ensure their transit systems serve as a viable alternative to the automobile. Transit must meet citizen expectations of comfort, reliability, speed and ease of use.

Funding

- Municipalities have the task of setting transit fares at rates which cover a reasonable percentage of operating costs while at the same time ensuring affordability for those who need it most.
- As much as provincial and federal governments need to provide long, term predictable funding for municipalities, municipalities must also make firm budget commitments towards expanding and maintaining their transit systems.

Land use planning

- Transit systems which service sprawling low density, single use developments will always face fiscal problems. One of the key factors in making the provision of transit more affordable is to put a stop to current building practises and move towards TOD. There are numerous papers and studies on how municipalities work with developers and other community partners to promote transit oriented development through providing incentives and changing land use bylaws, including AUMA's own Sustainable Land Use Planning Policy Paper.¹⁷

Regional/Intermunicipal Planning

¹⁷ The paper can be found on AUMA's website under report: www.auma.ca

- Alberta citizens expect to be able to move effortlessly between municipalities. Municipalities have to work together to make this happen. The Draft Land-Use Framework will guide regional cooperation; it is up to every municipality to participate in good faith. In particular, municipalities will cooperatively develop land use plans conducive to the provision of public transit and should share the costs of transit infrastructure and operations used by their citizens. The establishment of regional or even provincial transit authorities should be considered. There are models in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec that Alberta can draw from to create a workable system for itself.

Municipal Sustainability Planning

- Local and regional planning will be made easier if each community has developed a vision for the future and is committed to the principles of sustainability.

b. Government of Alberta

Developing a Transit Strategy for Alberta directly aligns with the Government's vision for the future as expressed in a number of plans and strategies. Alberta's 20-Year Strategic Capital Plan states:

"Alberta will boast a world-class transportation system comprising roads and highways, bridges and overpasses, railways and transit lines that are in great condition. This integrated transportation system will unite the entire province and provide safe and efficient transport of people, goods and services. This "future Alberta" will offer efficient, accessible and environmentally responsible public transportation systems. It will feature better, faster and safer connections within and between major urban centres and with their neighbouring communities, as well as into Alberta's high growth industrial areas."

Development of a Provincial Transit Strategy

- The Government of Alberta must commit to working with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and its members towards the development of a Comprehensive Provincial Transit Strategy as outlined in this paper.
- As part of the Strategy the Government must make a firm long-term funding commitment to public transit. This funding must be separate from MSI Transfers. The \$1.4 billion provided through MSI is meant to reflect the education portion of the property tax. It has long been understood that property taxes are not sufficient to fulfill the needs of strategic transit

infrastructure investments. Past Provincial commitments demonstrate the Governments recognition of the need to assist in filling this gap. As important as past and current provincial contributions to transit have been, there is a need for the province to make a commitment to long –term predictable funding that will support the long-term planning that goes into transit development.

Alberta's international reputation, its productivity in terms of moving goods and labour efficiently, its attractiveness to tourists and potential residents, its accessibility to all citizens and its ability to meet environmental targets all rely on having an efficient transit system. Therefore, the Province has an important role to play in funding transit systems

- Assess ways in which tax measures and other incentives can be used to shift transportation from vehicles to lower carbon modes.

Framework for Land Use Planning

- As emphasized throughout this paper one of the most important factors in reducing automobile use and increasing the economic viability of public transit is to shift development patterns towards transit oriented development. Many urban municipalities are already moving in this direction, but are often finding their efforts counteracted by single use rural residential, commercial and industrial development. The development of regional plans under the new land use framework can help to reduce both urban and rural sprawl but only if it is backed up with incentives for improved planning practices and penalties for uncoordinated, non-integrated, expansive developments.

c. Government of Canada

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities Big City Mayor's Caucus released their proposal for a National Transit Strategy in March of 2007. In it they recommend the Federal Government take the following measures:

- Provide \$2 billion annually in new funding for capital expenses, maintenance and expansion of the transit system. This amount would be adjusted to keep pace with inflation.
- Set funding eligibility to require municipalities to have "a council approved land use and transportation plan that favours transit as the primary means for accommodating future growth in travel demand".
- Develop further tax incentives that support transit.

- Collaborate in research that promotes information sharing among transit systems and identifies policy approaches all orders of government can use to realize economic, social and environmental goals through increasing transit ridership.¹⁸

d. AUMA

Advocacy

- AUMA will consult with its members in the development and implementation of a transit strategy and advocate their interests to the provincial government and other organizations.
 - AUMA will continue to work towards the implementation convention adopted recommendations Towards a *Light Rail Transit Program*.
- AUMA will work with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Urban Transit Association and other related organizations in their efforts towards a National Transit Strategy.

Research and information sharing

- AUMA will also work with organizations like FCM and CUTA to provide municipalities the information they need to plan and operate their systems more effectively. There is an almost overwhelming amount of information on transit and TOD. The challenge for the Association will be to find and present its members with the information that can be most easily translated into action.
- How bulk purchasing of transit vehicles and other equipment could be established in Alberta to save municipalities money, will be one particular focus of exploration.

Connection with Municipal Sustainability Planning (MSP)

- AUMA recognizes that municipalities have a lack of capacity to implement all the plans and policies that are circulating in municipal world. The Association has focused its current phase of its MSP project on providing municipalities with further human resource support and information on planning. Through this project the association will endeavour to link MSP and Transit planning to enable municipalities to leverage efforts and investment towards attaining the co-benefits that transit provides in a variety of sustainability dimensions.

¹⁸ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Big City Mayors' Caucus, 2007, *National Transit Strategy*, p.3-4.

9. Priority: Light Rail Transit

The first priority under the proposed Provincial Transit Strategy should be the expansion of LRT. AUMA's policy *Towards a Light Rail Transit Program* was endorsed by its members during its 2007 Annual Convention. Although the main focus of the paper is on expanding LRT in Alberta's two largest cities, municipalities throughout the province recognize the importance of LRT as the foundation of transit for the province.

Quite simply Light Rail Transit has become a requirement for any major urban centre because of its ability to move large numbers of people quickly, comfortably and reliably. Whether it is simply to move people to and from downtown on a daily basis or transport residents and visitors to major entertainment and sporting events, the economic and social vibrancy of the Capital and Calgary regions relies on their light rail systems. At AUMA's 2008 Regional sessions even representatives of municipalities outside the region look forward to the day that they can arrive on the outskirts of the cities and then transfer to LRT reach their final destinations. Given the importance of LRT to providing Alberta's citizens with efficient and sustainable transportation system in their two major metropolitan centers AUMA's members endorsed the following recommendations:

- THAT LRT funding and planning should be addressed through a process completely separate from MSI. This would allow both Edmonton and Calgary – who have very old infrastructure, to address the substantial infrastructure deficit with MSI transfers.
- That the Government of Alberta establishes a LRT grant program to provide substantial support for the expansion and operation of LRT systems in Edmonton and Calgary over and above what has been provided in the past through the gas tax program.
 - To begin, the program should provide a significant injection of money to address currently unfunded expansion requirements for both cities. The next step would be the establishment of an annual transfer to the cities to support further expansion, maintenance and operating costs of effective LRT systems. This fund should be based on criteria that the cities can use for their planning and budgets.
- Further that the Government of Alberta work in partnership with the Government of Canada and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary to develop a long term trilateral funding strategy for the maintenance and expansion of LRT in the Province of Alberta.
 - The two cities cannot act alone because the LRT systems are linked with regional transportation systems and the benefits of LRT flow to neighbouring municipalities. Therefore the surrounding municipalities need to be engaged, along with the two largest cities, in planning for enhanced regional transportation systems with LRT as its core.
- And finally, that LRT be recognized in provincial initiatives including the Land Use Framework and the Climate Change Action Plan as serving as the foundation for providing more sustainable land development and transportation options to Albertans.

For a more comprehensive review of the benefits of LRT and recommendations around supporting its expansion, please see Appendix "A" Towards a *Light Rail Transit Program*.

The Government of Alberta has already taken steps towards fulfilling these recommendations in making transit a priority for planning in the metro regions and by announcing the \$2 billion Green Transit Incentives Program. If local governments and regions are going to be able to plan and implement green transit initiatives that will help to green Alberta's growth, build communities and create opportunities well into the future, they need long term funding commitments and a strong planning framework.

As part of its own growth management plan and the work it is doing in terms of the Capital Regional Integrated Growth Management Plan (CRIBMP), Edmonton has identified infrastructure needs over the next 10 years. The City has calculated a total \$25.8 billion in Capital projects. Of that, the largest figure is the capital need for LRT at \$7.7 billion. That is in addition to the \$1 billion needed for transit facilities and the bus fleet.

It is clear that Edmonton and Calgary need to expand their public transit systems, and in particular LRT, in order to manage the growth they are experiencing. User fees and property taxes will not cover the costs of expansion. The plan for this expansion must take place within a regional and intercity context. Therefore, successful expansion requires a Provincial Transit Strategy.