

## Centre LRT: Phase 2 Engagement Summary

During Phase 2 engagement of the Centre LRT Route Selection/Concept Planning process, the project team continued to build understanding with the public and stakeholders of the project purpose, parameters, challenges and intended outcomes. Phase 2 engagement was intended to close the conversation on the route selection, prior to the presentation to Council. If approved, the concept planning study would begin.

Feedback was gathered on the preferred route, and local knowledge was solicited that could help refine the route selection, and shape future stop locations, track alignment and community integration as part of the concept planning process.

Input was provided during three public engagement sessions, along with individual and group meetings with key stakeholders and three targeted surveys. Hundreds of individual comments were provided on maps illustrating the preferred route during the engagement sessions, and hard copy and online surveys were targeted toward the public; businesses along the route; as well as students, faculty and staff of the University of Alberta. The total number of surveys submitted was 1,605 (1,575 public, 17 business, and 13 University of Alberta).

The following is a general summary of what we learned overall during this phase of engagement. It is important to note that the results should be read with the understanding that the responses summarized represent the views of respondents and commenters, and are not a statistical representation of the entire population.

Overall, there is general support for the preferred route with an understanding of the links it will provide to key destinations and connectivity with the overall transit network. The primary concern with both those who support the route and those who do not, is the impact of the low-floor light rail transit (LRT) on traffic flow, most specifically along Whyte Avenue, which is a key east/west vehicle and emergency vehicle connection.

Based on individual meetings held with stakeholders groups, there is general support for the preferred route from the Downtown Business Association, Old Strathcona Business Association, Downtown Edmonton Community League, Oliver Community League, and Strathcona Community League, as well as those groups representing both the Bonnie Doon Mall and CP Rail Yard redevelopments. The Edmonton Radial Railway Society that operates the Edmonton's streetcar understands the necessity of the LRT and the preferred route, and has a desire that the streetcar will continue to function along with the new LRT.

While the Old Strathcona Business Association generally supports the route, individual businesses are concerned about the impact of the LRT on the character of the area, parking, and most importantly, the construction impacts on business operations and profitability.

Other community leagues, including Ritchie are somewhat supportive with concerns about loss of on-street residential parking, parasitic parking, shortcutting and traffic congestion on Whyte Avenue. Garneau Community League notes fears about the LRT's impact to the neighbourhood's historical homes and disruptions to the community's aesthetic character, as well as traffic flow overall.

The team will continue to work with these stakeholders during the concept planning phase to ensure concerns are considered and issues are mitigated as is possible.

The University of Alberta recognizes the value of LRT serving their campus as long as some key items are addressed. Student safety is important to the University of Alberta. As such, the University of Alberta has expressed a need to work with the City to ensure that safety for those walking and cycling is considered. Related to student safety, the University of Alberta requests that the City work them to further considers how the LRT will supports active mode connections and place-making opportunities throughout the campus. Finally, the University of Alberta wishes to ensure that the LRT will not affect sensitive research equipment with noise, vibrations, or electromagnetic interference. University staff have indicated that the preferred route has the potential to provide a link between Campus St. Jean, the university's Main Campus, as well as a key destination for students, Whyte Avenue. The project team will continue to work closely with representatives of the University of Alberta to ensure their needs are met.

Hospital representatives have indicated that the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre is important to the broader health care delivery network. The project team is committed to working closely with representatives from Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre to conduct a more in-depth study of potential route options through the area, and to address potential impacts to the hospital site. The team is also sharing information on the City's LRT Network Plan (2009) and the rationale for another LRT route through the university area into downtown.

### Public Survey Summary

Just over half (52%) of those surveyed support or strongly support the preferred route, with the remaining either opposed (39%), don't know (2%) or are unsure (7%). There are shared concerns by those who both support and oppose the preferred route, about the impact of the introduction of LRT on traffic flow overall and specifically along Whyte Avenue, with a potential loss of vehicle travel lanes along this key east/west connection.

Those who believe an effective transit system is a key element of a growing city and that LRT is an integral part of the needs of the broader transportation network, support the preferred route for the connectivity it will provide to key destinations and the expansion of the city's transit network overall. Many who strongly support the preferred route indicate transit is their preferred mode of transportation. They believe the new route is needed to improve public transportation service and are excited to see the plan move forward.

Supporters of the Whyte Avenue segment, who applaud the step to make the corridor more pedestrian-friendly, see the removal of cars in exchange for mass transit as a positive step in this direction. The ability to move more people to and from area businesses and festivals without the need for additional parking spaces is seen as a key benefit.

Those who oppose, who are unsure or who don't know how they feel, question the necessity of the route as they perceive the area is already well served by public transportation and feel an additional LRT route is unnecessary and therefore not worth the cost.

Other concerns shared by those who oppose the route include the functionality of the low-floor system during the harsh realities of winter, the negative impact of the LRT on the communities along the route including their walkability and character, the redundancy of having three bridges in proximity to one another, that the LRT should not be located at street level and the impact of the LRT construction on traffic flow.

## Business Survey Summary

A total of 17 businesses completed the Centre LRT Study Phase 2 business survey which was provided to all businesses along the route. All but two of the businesses are located on Whyte Avenue; one is located in Old Strathcona on 80 Avenue, and one is just off Whyte Avenue on 112 Street. The number of responses represents less than one per cent of the business population of the preferred route area. This small sample cannot be extrapolated to represent the broad community, but instead, must be considered from a qualitative point of view.

Representatives of the businesses who responded are split in their support of the LRT route. Those who support see great value in the addition of the route to the city's low-floor LRT network, the potential to bring many more customers to area businesses, and the benefits of a more pedestrian focused environment along Whyte Avenue, specifically.

Despite their level of support, there are concerns about impacts to businesses during construction and the potential loss in revenue during an extended construction period. If the City could look for ways to mitigate these impacts, an increase in support overall may be realized. Businesses are also concerned about the impacts of the LRT on vehicle traffic flow in an already congested roadway, as well as the potential loss of on-street and other parking areas. Some indicate that their clientele is unlikely to choose LRT over vehicles to access their business and the longer commute and loss of parking will therefore have a negative impact on businesses.

Business owners require more information on how the LRT will be of benefit over bus routes that currently exist along Whyte Avenue, as well as why a low-floor, at grade, LRT system has been chosen over an above-ground or below ground system.

## University of Alberta Survey Summary

As a key destination along the preferred route, a survey was administered for the University of Alberta. A total of 13 completed surveys were received, nearly equally split between students (7) and staff (6); nearly half of who ride transit daily or weekdays. As with the business survey, the input received from the small number of respondents is to be considered only from a qualitative point of view.

Most respondents (both staff and students) support the preferred LRT route noting the benefits for the city and the transit system overall. University of Alberta respondents, however, share concerns with others about the impacts of the LRT on traffic flow and congestion, especially in the university and Whyte Avenue areas, as well as access to businesses and parking.