



## **Additional Considerations from the River Valleys Committee regarding the Proposed Municipal Development Plan and Calgary Transportation Plan**

The River Valleys Committee (RVC) wishes to submit the following considerations for Calgary City Council's deliberations, regarding the proposed Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and Calgary Transportation Plan (CTP), both versions dated 8 May 2009. We sincerely appreciate the time and efforts the Plan-It Team have taken in consulting with our membership and in incorporating our earlier recommendations into their plans. However, the RVC remains concerned about several aspects of the documents, specifically in relation to (a) the two proposed new river crossings, (b) the protection of environmentally significant areas, and (c) the lack of a "guidebook" to accompany the MDP and CTP.

### **(a) Proposed river crossings**

The locations of both proposed new river crossings – Elbow River at 50 Avenue SW and Bow River at Shaganappi Trail NW – bisect invaluable and irreplaceable civic assets: River Park/Sandy Beach and Edworthy Park. Both of these sites also present technical and cultural challenges for bridge design, including geotechnical issues, height and length of span, disruptions to established activities and the constant evolution of public values, and will likely be accompanied by strong sentiments from Calgarians regardless of the timeframe involved.

*The rationale provided in the MDP and CTP for these two new crossings is not convincing.* There are many techniques and approaches available to "advantage" transit over private vehicles and the RVC believes that these have not been sufficiently explored, especially with respect to existing corridors in the vicinity of the proposed crossings. Calgary is already over-endowed with transportation corridors that are easily capable of accommodating more transit. Full economic assessments of all costs and benefits are required, including social and environmental costs and benefits.

The City's transportation modelling does NOT conclude that new river crossings are necessary; further modelling and analysis is required to justify their need. In simulations for the Dispersed Scenario, significant city-wide traffic "failures" were predicted along major transportation corridors. These failures were corrected by adding the two bridges, but no further modelling was done for Compact, Hybrid or Proposed Scenarios, which will theoretically present significantly reduced city-wide traffic demands and patterns. The MDP and CTP are scheduled for review and revision in ten years anyway – long before the need for these bridges is anticipated.

The proposed crossings should be deleted from the Plans; if their necessity is proven, the maps can be amended. River Crossings to be deleted from the maps include:

- Primary Transit Network (MDP, CTP).
- Primary Cycling Network (CTP).
- Transportation System Map, Appendix "A" (transportation system bylaw 40m2009). This map shows the proposed crossings as "streets" - not even "other rapid transit" routes!

### **(b) Environmentally significant areas**

According to the "Open Space Typology" (MDP Table 2.6, p. 62), Edworthy Park and River Park are areas of high city-wide significance encompassing all three typologies: patch, corridor and matrix; and our ecological network is "one of the defining features that establish Calgary's character, sense of place and quality of life" (section 2.6.4, p. 60). Although complicated, the value(s) of regional parks such as these can be

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assessed ecologically, culturally and economically. Credible assessments of the benefits provided by urban parks and open spaces are becoming more common and widespread; the RVC would be pleased to discuss recent evaluations and methodologies from elsewhere in North America.

*As Calgary densifies, protecting and preserving its inner-city ecological assets will become ever more critical.* Economic evaluations to date have not captured the social and environmental values of Calgary's parks and open spaces, and hence the economic rationales employed to justify competing needs (e.g., development, transportation, etc) have not been commensurate. Only by preparing even and comparable assessments can The City apply the triple bottom line effectively, and this is also the only way for Calgarians to make valid and objective infrastructure and planning decisions.

The City has recently amended its setback criteria for Environmental Reserves (ER) but there is still much room for improvement. These setbacks need to be applied across the city, in all established and newly developing areas equally. Moreover, setbacks should be defined so as to protect Environmentally Significant Areas as well as ER (which is typically used for areas that are unstable or undevelopable for technical reasons). It has been seen that proximity to natural features provides people with numerous social and health benefits, as well as raising and stabilizing neighbouring land values.

For example, The City's *Wetland Conservation Plan* includes methods to mitigate and compensate for disturbances (to wetlands), and this "No Net Loss" principle should be extended to other ecologically important elements of Calgary's landscape as well. Fair compensation for ecological degradation should be required where any major environmental asset is concerned. The Wetland Plan's prioritized hierarchy of approaches (1 avoid, 2 mitigate, 3 compensate) is commendable but too restricted in its use.

### **(c) MDP and CTP Guidebook**

The MDP and CTP are long and technical planning documents encompassing a broad range of issues, concepts, contexts, contingencies and eventualities. Even across the various disciplines intimately engaged in long-range urban planning, the Plans are complex and can be difficult to interpret. For example, there are policies to encourage many disparate objectives (e.g., environmental protection, infrastructure provision, community design, etc) scattered throughout the documents, making it a complicated task to piece together which policies might apply or take precedence over others in specific instances.

The intent of a "guidebook" would be to clarify the roles and responsibilities of various "players" involved in planning processes, including decision makers (i.e., City Aldermen), Administration business units, relevant industries, communities and other external stakeholders.

The RVC welcomes further opportunities to discuss these and other issues related to Calgary's long-range planning. Thank you kindly for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

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The RVC works to conserve, protect and champion Calgary's rivers, creeks, wetlands and valleys.