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Brief to the City of Edmonton  
Utilities and Engineering Committee

SUMMARY:

A. The Edmonton Social Planning Council urges City Council to orient itself away from expressways, parking lots and extension of downtown arterials, and toward the development of the public transit system, for the following reasons:

1. For many people, a good transit system is the only means of getting around a city. For the many people who do not drive, who do not have access to a car, who cannot afford or find parking at work or school, or whose car has broken down, city life is intolerable without a good transit system. On the other hand, with a good transit system, city life can be productive, rewarding and fun.

2. A good transit system benefits not only the people who ride it but also the car driver who has clearer streets.

3. A good transit system benefits all taxpayers because public transit is more efficient than roadways and parking lots (i.e., it costs less to move the same number of people).

4. There are many social benefits to building up a good transit system in lieu of facilities for the automobile;

a) employment is more stable in the transit system than in construction,

b) the downtown is more pleasant, useful and productive when transit serves the downtown instead of roads and their concomitant, parking lots,

c) massive roadways often involve destroying in one way or another, good older residential districts,

d) massive roadways often involve destroying out best parklands, whereas transit preserves them and makes them even more accessible.

B. The Edmonton Social Planning Council proposes that the transit system be developed in the following manner:

1. At all times the operations of the system must be well funded so that good service can be provided.

2. The electrical trolley system should be extended and a light rapid transit system developed. Electrically powered vehicles are cleaner, quieter and more efficient.

3. Experiments should be conducted with

a) dial-a-bus,

b) exclusive transit lanes,

c) park-and-ride.

4. The drivers' suggestions for improving the system should be solicited regularly and eagerly.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council suggests that because public transit is an essential service benefiting everyone, not just those who ride it, it should be free. It should be funded out of general city revenue and grants from senior levels of government. In the interim, fares must not be increased, and the possibilities for extending through rush hours, free passes for the elderly, should be examined.

Brief to the City of Edmonton  
Utilities and Engineering Committee

Re: City of Edmonton General Transportation Plan.  
From: The Edmonton Social Planning Council.

INTRODUCTION:

Cities exist because they provide easy access to a large number of resources, to shopping and entertainment alternatives, and to employment and educational opportunities. The key to this access is of course the transportation system; it must be inexpensive, safe, convenient and efficient. If a city did not have a good transportation system, then its residents would be better off in the country where the air is cleaner, the people usually friendlier and the landscape more restful.

THE NEED FOR PUBLIC TRANSIT:

While recent figures for Edmonton regarding operators' licences and automobile ownership are unavailable, there are 1971 figures for Alberta which probably approximate the Edmonton case. Thirty-three percent of Alberta's population over the age of ten (i.e., the age at which people might be considered old enough to travel by themselves) do not possess an operator's licence for either motorcycle or automobile. (Some of these of course might have a licence but not access to a vehicle). In over twenty-two percent of Alberta's households there is no automobile. (Since a household can include a number of families or single people sharing an apartment or house, then the percentage of families without an automobile is probably somewhat higher.) It is the contention of the Edmonton Social Planning Council that for this large number of people who don't drive themselves (some 150,000 Edmontonians over the age of ten), or who do not have a car in their household (some 35,000 households representing about 100,000 people), for people who are non-drivers, for people who drive but cannot find or afford parking at work (\$20. to \$40. a month downtown for instance), and for people whose cars are temporarily out of order, the city must maintain a high level of public transit. Indeed, as the city grows it is imperative that the transit system be developed at an even faster rate than the road system is developed. The bigger the city, the less efficient is the private automobile as a means of transportation.

It is not only the transit rider who gains when the public transportation system is expanded in a large city; so do all taxpayers because transit facilities cost less per traveller than the freeways. Even the car-drivers gain when the transit system is given high priority, because the more people who ride transit, the freer are the roads for the driver. (On the other hand, the more people who drive their own cars the more congested are the roads for the transit rider.) Developers gain by not having to build or set aside major parking facilities and therefore indirectly, so should the apartment or office renters. Accordingly, we urge City Council to set as its first transportation priority the continuous improvement of the transportation system.

#### TRANSIT FARES:

Many of the people who need to make use of the transit system either regularly or occasionally are among the least well-off financially in Edmonton. Therefore, the Edmonton Social Planning Council urges City Council to hold the line on transit fares at their present rate. This is important not only as a matter of social justice, but also as a matter of financial self-interest for the City. The higher the cost of using transit (considerations of convenience and speed aside), the fewer people, among those who have the option of driving their car, who will use transit. Thus the more the City will be pressured into spending money on facilities for the automobile which, compared with public transit, is inefficient as a people-moving system. This is primarily because massive roadways and parking lots eat up more developable, and therefore revenue-producing land per person travelling than does transit. Already some blocks in downtown Edmonton are over 50% devoted to automobile parking, not counting on-street parking.

Indeed, we would ask City Council to consider the possibility of reducing transit fares, and ultimately providing transit as a free service to the user, just as we provide parks, the library, health clinics and other essential services.

#### TRANSIT FARES FOR THE ELDERLY:

One very specific point we would like to make with regard to fares is that we have found in working with various groups of the elderly that the constraints imposed on their free pass (it is not valid in rush hours) puts on them an unreasonable pressure when coming to meetings or visiting friends. It is undignified for older persons to

have to leave early from some activity, or arrive late, because their pass is not otherwise valid. It is important to note too that transfers are not provided to people with passes; thus free pass holders are in trouble if they start a trip before rush hour but are delayed or miss a connection for some reason. While of course elderly people are welcome to use the system in rush hours by paying the normal fare, it must be remembered that when one's income is \$150. per month, every quarter counts.

Still, the City is to be commended for having taken the step in the first place of providing some free transportation to older citizens. It is an important step in the right direction. Now we would ask that a study be undertaken by the transit planners as to whether leaving passes valid for all times of the day would put much of a burden on the system compared with the important benefits it would provide for the elderly user.

#### SOCIAL BENEFITS OF PUBLIC TRANSIT:

There are various social benefits to building up the transit system as opposed to constructing increasing numbers of freeways, major arterials and parking garages.

1. Employment in the operations of a transit system is more stable than the intensive activity involved in major construction projects. Also, under an improved transit system, the work should be more pleasant for transit drivers. There should be less crowding, and tension to keep up with tight schedules in rush hours, and therefore less reason to drive erratically or discourteously.

2. With transit, the City can be formed around the needs of the pedestrian rather than of the driver. Anybody observing the City from say the top of the Chateau Lacombe cannot help but be impressed with the vast amounts of land devoted to the auto in downtown Edmonton. This makes shopping difficult and travelling among offices inefficient for the pedestrian. Walking by vast parking lots becomes particularly unpleasant in the winter.

Even some of the streets would not need to be so wide, were the downtown less oriented to the car. Not only could we have more shops and offices downtown but also more parks, trees, flowers, pavillions in the winter and outdoor restaurants in the summer. The possibilities are truly exciting once we begin thinking about de-emphasising automobile facilities downtown in favor of the pedestrian and transit. What a tourist attraction Edmonton could be all year round!

3. Building expressways, major arterials and parking lots often involves tearing down good houses and other buildings; the construction of transit requires far less destruction - if any, in this City. Furthermore, transit, if properly constructed, does not have the deleterious affects of noise and smell on nearby dwellings that major roads produce.

This point bears on our greatest concern about the position paper: namely the role foreseen for arterials. Many people are frightened about the impact that these "arterials" might have on their neighbourhood. We suggest that many arterial extensions proposed for the inner city will not be needed if the public transit system is properly developed. The importance of this matter for the whole city is appreciable: retention of older downtown neighbourhoods is one of the best steps a city can take toward preserving its health and safety.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING EDMONTON'S TRANSIT SYSTEM:

1. The first suggestion for improving the transit system is, of course, that the number of routes be increased and that more frequent service be established on many routes. Long waits and having to watch full vehicles pass you by do not contribute to the attractiveness of transit riding. This means that whatever else the transit system must always have enough money to provide decent service. This must be our prime consideration at all times, whatever good new technological innovations or fare-collection programs we choose to introduce.

2. The Edmonton Social Planning Council urges extension of the transit system in Edmonton through increasing use of electrically-powered equipment. This means, extending the trolley system and creating a rapid transit system. In this latter connection we are impressed with the possibilities of an overhead wire light rapid transit system such as many European cities - some half the size of Edmonton - are developing.

3. We are intrigued with the possibilities of dial-a-bus of the kind being experimented with in Regina, especially if this is used in conjunction with a light rapid transit system for carrying passengers along heavily travelled routes.

4. We suggest that the City experiment with exclusive lanes for busses and trolleys - particularly in the congested areas of downtown. (e.g., from 97th Street to 109th Street along Jasper Avenue.)

5. Experiment with developing park-and-ride facilities in the outer areas of the city.

6. We are certain that many drivers understand problems on their bus routes involving service hours, location of stops, schedules, routings, etc. - details which the planners cannot possibly keep fully in touch with. If a program of regular consultation with drivers so as to determine what they see as problems and innovations/solutions,<sup>is</sup> not now underway, we suggest that one be established immediately. The drivers' ideas should result in more convenient and more efficient service. Perhaps too, the attitude of the few drivers who are unpleasant with patrons might improve because minor or major irritations have been removed and more generally just because their suggestions are listened to, considered and where possible, acted on. Increasingly in this city the transit driver is going to play an important role. If we expect him to treat the patrons with respect, his own skills and knowledge must be respected by the City.

#### A PREDICTION:

It is our prediction that with an increasing tendency for society to move toward the four day and three day weeks (See Financial Post, October 19th) that the rush hour press will be lessened. This is of course good for whatever mode of transportation the City opts for, but in regard to transit in particular it means that we will not need to develop such a massive investment in equipment that is only to be used four to six hours of the day, nor will we have to pay drivers overtime and compensation for working rediculously difficult hours. It means that we don't need expressways, and that development of a good all day long transit system will be cheaper and more efficient.

#### FUNDING SOURCES FOR TRANSIT:

The Edmonton Social Planning Council supports the measures taken by the City to secure provincial and federal funding for transit. Should such funding not be forthcoming, however, we believe that it would be false economy in the extreme to take and match provincial money for roads just because it is available. It would be better to use the money which we would spend matching provincial road grants on developing the transit system. Certainly, money spent on public transit goes more than twice as far in terms of moving people as compared with money spent on roads.

#### CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING:

We sincerely hope that the kind of expense involved in stopping the Spadina expressway in Toronto - the expense of building an unused road, the expense borne by the people who moved, and the administrative expense

in resolving such a long dispute - need not be repeated here. It will happen though if the citizens' views are taken into account too late.

A process must be developed to involve affected citizens all along the line. These hearings are a good start, though they could have been more valuable had fewer obstacles been placed in the way of citizens. The establishment of three different deadlines, the requirement to produce 25 copies and the lack of good data to supplement the position paper, have all tended, we suggest, to reduce the amount of citizen participation from what it might have been. Nevertheless, we are optimistic about the prospects for the future and hope that Council will continue to seek the citizen's opinion, not only more often and sooner, but in a way which encourages all citizens, not only professionals and businessmen, to present their views to Council.

#### CONCLUSION:

It is only by the strongest effort that we are going to remove ourselves from the roadbuilding culture; from the cycle of building expressways and parking lots to meet traffic demand, which means that less money is available for transit and that the City is not built for the pedestrian, which means that fewer people who have the choice ~~ride~~ ride transit, which means more people drive their cars, which means more massive roadways, which means less money for transit, which means some people who do not have the choice of riding or driving just stay at home, which means loneliness and unfriendly streets to walk on, which means more people driving, which means more expressways, and so on.

We must get ourselves into a pedestrian-and-public-transit cycle of building up the transit system, which means less money for great expressways and (what are in effect) subsidized parking lots, all of which means that more people use transit, which means there is less need for automobile facilities, which means that we devote space which might have been allocated to roads and parking lots to parks and stores and offices and paths and trees, all of which means that it is more pleasant to walk and that people do not want to drive their cars so much, which means that they want transit, which means there is less money for automobile facilities, and so on.

It is now considered a rhetorical cliché to ask whether our city is to be built for people or for cars. But the dichotomy is real and the question important.



We must have a good transportation system if people are to get the full advantage which a city provides its residents. It is the contention of the Edmonton Social Planning Council that only if this system is oriented to the pedestrian and transit can we be sure that the City will develop healthily, efficiently, and in a way which serves all its citizens.