EDMONTON: Changing the Way We Grow and the Way We Move

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ABSTRACT

Edmonton is a city in transition. As we look to the future, we must chart a new course for the way we grow and the way we move. In 2009, new integrated land use and transportation strategic plans will be reviewed by Edmonton City Council to guide the city’s development into the future. The Municipal Development Plan, titled ‘The Way We Grow’, will guide Edmonton’s growth and development for the next 10 years. The Transportation Master Plan, titled ‘The Way We Move’, establishes a framework for how the City will address its future transportation needs. Through these plans, the City will integrate land-use planning and transportation decisions to create a more compact and efficient urban form. These plans encourage development around a network of high speed transit corridors, integrated with mixed land uses of increasing density to create areas of Transit Oriented Development (TOD).

Once approved, the Plans will be implemented through more details plans, guidelines, programs and policies. Performance measures will also be developed to measure the progress of these plans.

In the development of these plans and their initial stages of application several challenges were encountered and lessons have been learned in hindsight. These include:

- Importance of a city vision and common direction
- Influence of regional planning
- Importance of aligning city strategic plans
- Applying the integration of land use and transportation through the development of a transit and land-use integrated framework.
- Allowing flexibility in design and application of TOD guidelines in order to address immediate demands yet provide for the evolution into more intense TOD.

Through the integration of the City’s land use and transportation strategic plans and the consistent application of those plans, the City of Edmonton will continue to provide leadership in sustainable transportation practices and create the compact, liveable, and sustainable city of the future that is envisioned.
1.0 INTRODUCTION

Edmonton is a city in transition. No longer a mid-size prairie city, rapid growth in recent years has changed the face of Edmonton as it takes its place as one of the important economic centres in Canada and the world. With a population of about 750,000, the city is at the heart of a thriving region of one million people. By 2040, the city is expected to grow by 50% to 1.1 million, while the entire Edmonton region is expected to grow by 60% to 1.6 million people.

Edmonton is centre of a region with a strong economy even in light of the current economic downturn. It has a thriving knowledge based economy with a strong resource-based service sector. Its transportation system is a contributing factor to the economic vitality and competitive advantage of the City and Region. It is recognized that the current growth patterns are unaffordable and we must maximize the use of the new and existing public infrastructure. Therefore, as we look to the future, we must chart a new course for the way we grow and the way we move.

To guide the City’s development into the future, two new policy plans have been drafted. A Municipal Development Plan: The Way We Grow will guide Edmonton’s growth and development. The Transportation Master Plan: The Way We Move establishes the framework for how the City will address its future transportation needs. The Way We Grow and The Way We Move were developed concurrently as an acknowledgment that land use and transportation are inherently linked.

This paper provides an overview of these two plans and highlights some of the lessons and challenges experienced with respect to the integration of transportation and land use in the development of the policy plans and their initial application.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Challenges

The development of the two plans started with a review of the current situation and current trends into the future, looking to a horizon year of 2040. Edmonton has several challenges that are common to many North American cities:

- To accommodate our expanding population we cannot continue to develop our city as we have in the past. Our growth is currently scattered across many developing neighbourhoods without the provision of full public services. The low density development form we share with other Canadian cities is financially, socially and environmentally unsustainable.
The City of Edmonton currently has more than $32.6 billion of City-owned infrastructure, providing the essential services that maintain Edmonton’s quality of life. Most infrastructure has a life cycle of 50 years, all requiring operating and maintenance costs and eventual replacement. As Edmonton continues to grow, we expand our infrastructure assets and the corresponding requirement to fund new operating, maintenance and eventual replacement costs. Edmonton has acknowledged that this is unaffordable and we must maximize the use of new and existing infrastructure.

Edmontonians are now making longer trips and driving more. Trips have increased in greater proportion than the population increase as we now have to drive farther due to the expansion of the city. This has resulted in more road congestion. Edmontonians and those living in the Capital Region have some of the highest single passenger car trip rates in Canada.

The economic vitality and the sustainability of the Capital Region depend on Edmonton and its neighbours functioning as an integrated whole when it comes to transportation, land use, economic development and community services.

Globally, it’s been acknowledged that community design and access to active and alternative transportation opportunities affect health. Relationships between public health and planning can assist in the prevention of public health concerns such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, asthma, injury, depression, violence and social inequities.

Edmontonians are calling for a holistic view of Edmonton, an approach to development that recognizes the interdependencies our development decisions have on our quality of life, environmental impact and our long term ability to sustain our investment in essential social and physical infrastructure.

The majority of the world’s people now live in cities. Cities are increasingly acknowledging the important role they have in addressing climate change and supporting a biologically diverse eco-system. The tendency of cities to consume the world’s resources and habitat is unsustainable. Edmontonians know this and are demanding we act to address climate change and conserve and protect natural habitat in the City and the Region.

There is significant growth projected in the 65+ age group as the baby boomers age. This demographic shift will have a significant impact on housing choices, community needs, future travel patterns and associated transportation facility requirements.
2.2 City Strategic Vision

The Way Ahead is the City of Edmonton’s Strategic Plan for 2009-2018. It was developed at a time of rapid growth and change and intended to set overall direction and align priorities for the development of the future city. Edmonton’s City Council, with input from over 2200 Edmontonians, established six 10-year strategic goals to provide a clear focus for the future. These goals will direct long-term planning for the City and help set priorities for the delivery and improvement of services, programs and infrastructure. The Way Ahead is the Strategic Plan that sets the direction for The Way We Grow and The Way We Move.

The Way Ahead 10-year strategic goals are:

1. Preserve and Sustain Edmonton’s Environment
2. Improve Edmonton’s Livability
3. Transform Edmonton’s Urban Form
4. Shift Edmonton’s Transportation Modes
5. Diversify Edmonton’s Economy
6. Ensure Edmonton’s Financial Sustainability

Four principles underpin the implementation of the Strategic Plan

- Integration
- Sustainability
- Livability
- Innovation

To focus the City’s actions towards achieving the vision, three year priority goals that contribute to the achievement of the strategic goals provide the direction over the course of the Council’s term. The Strategic Plan includes performance measures for the 10-year strategic goals that will form the basis for an annual reporting of progress toward (or away) from the 10-year goals.

3.0 POLICY DIRECTION

In order to bring the City Vision and Strategic Goals to life, The Way We Move (Transportation Master Plan) and The Way We Grow (Municipal Development Plan) provide policy direction. These plans are integrated, complementary and are a key step toward achieving a holistic approach to strategic planning.

The two plans reflect a shift in direction from current City practice and are intended to create a more compact, livable, healthy and sustainable city.
3.1 The Way We Move: Transportation Master Plan

The key directions of The Way We Move are intended to help the City progress towards the future City outlined in the City vision and Strategic Goals. This is achieved by integrating land use and transportation and optimizing use of transportation infrastructure assets.

Transportation and land use integration

♦ The transportation system and land uses and urban design complement and support each other in creating a more compact, healthy and sustainable city.
♦ Medium and higher density residential and employment growth focused around key transit nodes and corridors to promote Transit Oriented Development.
♦ Industrial areas located in consideration of transportation facilities that will accommodate goods and services movement and labour force mobility.

Public transportation as a cornerstone

♦ Significant investment in premium transit with a goal to provide LRT in all sectors of the city in conjunction with a supporting, comprehensive bus network.
♦ Public transportation will optimize and expand the carrying capacity of the transportation system.

Manage the Transportation System More Effectively

♦ Use traffic management and transportation supply measures to optimize the operation of the roadways.
♦ Implement a Transit System Priority program on key transit corridors.
♦ Encourage Transportation Demand management (TDM) programs to promote alternative, non-driving modes of transportation

Roadway improvements focus on efficient goods movement

♦ Diminished focus on catering to commuter traffic
♦ Major roadway expansion projects focused on goods movement corridors or areas of transit priority.
♦ Roadway and intersection improvement projects undertaken to address safety concerns, transit priority or goods movement.

Encouragement of Active Transportation

♦ Increased opportunities for active transportation modes to provide an improved range of attractive travel options.

Well-maintained and managed infrastructure

♦ The transportation system is planned, developed and built so that the City is able to keep it in a good state of repair.
♦ A robust maintenance practice facilitates year round transportation for all modes.
Regional Interface
♦ Work as part of Capital Region Board to facilitate Regional improvements

3.2 The Way We Grow: Municipal Development Plan

The Way We Grow provides strategic policy direction for urban form, growth and development of Edmonton. Key directions of the plan encourage a holistic view of community planning, with high importance given to the integration of land use and transportation.

The MDP will manage growth to become a more sustainable, healthy and compact. The Way We Grow will:
• Promote the downtown as the prime focus Edmonton’s growth.
• Encourage medium and higher density growth and development to align with key transit nodes and corridors (LRT and transit stations and high frequency transit corridors).
• Maintain and rejuvenate mature neighbourhoods through redevelopment guidelines.
• Contain a growth strategy to ensure approved plans for developing and planned communities are the immediate focus for growth.
• Designate an industrial reserve area to provide jobs and business opportunities in south Edmonton.

The MDP’s goal is to design complete, healthy and livable communities. The Way We Grow encourages neighbourhoods to have:
• A physical design that supports health and livability
• A range of accessible, flexible, inclusive and safe parks and public facilities.
• A choice of housing to meet the needs of all demographic and income groups.
• A variety of transportation modes and active transportation networks.

The MDP’s Goal is to provide high quality urban spaces, buildings and streets to make Edmonton a great place to live and visit. The Way We Grow will encourage:
• High quality urban design throughout Edmonton.
• Inviting, safe, accessible and well connected public spaces and buildings.
• Streets, sidewalks and boulevards to provide safe and universal access.

The MDP’s Goal is to support prosperity. The Way We Grow will encourage:
• Promote the growth of office employment opportunities across the city, with Downtown as the primary focus.
• Develop more sustainable, accessible and walkable retail and mixed use centres.
• Increase employment opportunities and municipal revenues through attraction, growth and development of industrial business.
3.3 Status of the Plans

Currently, both plans are draft and were given a first reading at City Council in November, 2008. Although the Plans will return to Council in June, 2009, it is unlikely that they will be approved until late 2009. Implementation and Performance Measures Plans will be developed after the plans are approved by City Council.

4.0 ADMINISTRATIVE LESSONS

The development of these Plans as well as the initial stages of their application posed many challenges as well as lessons that are learned in hindsight. Some of these are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Common Vision

While it seems like an obvious first step, the City of Edmonton did not have a City Vision at the start of the process to develop land use and transportation plans and policies. The importance of a common vision for the future development of the City cannot be understated. A City vision that is supported by politicians and citizens is a critical element for defining policy direction and giving support for a change in practice. Defining a City Vision and Strategic Goals allowed for both the Way We Grow and The Way We Move to be developed with the same overarching goals so that the plans are complementary and work together. Subsidiary City plans and strategies are also developed to support not only strategic level plans, but the greater City vision and Goals.

4.2 Regional Planning Influence

Throughout the development of The Way We Grow and The Way We Move, there was a keen awareness that growth and development within the City of Edmonton is considerably influenced by activity within the Capital Region. While the City has a vision for a more compact, sustainable city, success of that vision will be affected by policies and practices of the surrounding communities.

In April, 2008, the Alberta Government established the Capital Region Board made up of 25 participating municipalities. (http://capitalregionboard.ab.ca/) This group was mandated to prepare a Capital Region Growth Plan that includes the following four components:

- A comprehensive, integrated regional land use plan
- A regional inter-municipal network transit plan
- A plan to coordinate geographic information services
- A plan for social and affordable housing

At the time of writing, the regional land use plan has been developed to the point of outlining principles, but has not yet identified further details. Prior to the initiation of the
Capital Region Board, the City of Edmonton established its future vision and brought that vision into the discussions with other communities regarding the future of the region. Edmonton was able to be a leader in presenting sustainable development concepts. Although most municipalities are in concurrence with the concepts, there are discrepancies between individual community aspirations and the overall application of sustainability concepts to the region. It is understood that legislation will require both the MDP and TMP to conform to the principles of the Regional Plan, however as this Regional Board and its processes are still in their infancy, tests of the approval and compliance have not occurred.

In an ideal situation, a regional plan would be established first, defining regional characteristics that municipal plans could then align with. However, in this instance, the City of Edmonton was able to positively influence the regional discussion by having a strong direction for the City.

### 4.3 Changing the Current Direction

The two plans The Way We Grow and The Way We Move reflect a shift in direction from current City practice and are intended to create a more compact, livable, healthy and sustainable city. Although, these plans propose a long term strategy, it is expected that changes will occur incrementally. At the start of the process of plan development, there was an element of skepticism and resistance within the organization to the directions proposed by the plans. However, as the development of the plans has progressed there has been increasing momentum and a wider awareness of the need to change current practices. While much of the increased awareness is due to a global prominence of sustainability issues, the City has also worked to identify and communicate challenges that are facing Edmonton that lead to the need for change. There is also recognition of the enormous infrastructure deficit facing Canadian cities and the challenges to fund the maintenance and replacement of public works.

While there is a recognition and support for policy direction to encourage sustainable development, there are varying opinions about the level of City direction that should be provided. On the one hand, there is concern for the rights of land-owners that may be affected by specific policy direction that encourage compact growth. On the other hand, there is a concern that small incremental changes will not bring about the kind of city change that is outlined in the City Vision and a greater shift in direction is required to bring about change in urban form. Growth management policies are still the subject of discussion for The Way We Grow.

### 4.4 Integration of Plans

The integration of the Transportation Master Plan and the Municipal Developments Plan was raised as an extremely important factor by both politicians and citizens as a reflection of the importance of land use and transportation integration. Although the teams that developed Way We Grow and The Way We Move worked closely together, there was a need for stronger evidence of plan integration in the public perception.
In addition to these two plans, several other planning exercises were on-going concurrently, causing some confusion about how all the plans fit together. In order to address the challenge of integrating City plans, processes and decision-making, a cross-department team was struck. The team developed action plans to increase inter-departmental alignment.

Working through issues to enhance the integration of plans helped to crystallize the purpose and the hierarchy of various plans and how they interact to achieve the City Strategic Goals. The package of plans has been entitled ‘Transforming Edmonton’ to give the indication that each plan is part of a larger strategy intended to transform the city into the future city described in the City Vision. It was acknowledged that the City Vision and Strategic Goals provides the overarching direction, and plans to provide strategic direction include the Municipal Development Plan land use plan (The Way We Grow), the Transportation Master Plan (The Way We Move), the Environmental Strategic Plan (The Way We Green) and a Social Plan (The Way We Live). Figure 4.1 outlines City plan hierarchy and inter-relationship.

One effective means to increase public awareness of the integration of City plans was the roll-out of common plan titles and look for all strategic plans as shown in Figure 4.2. The visual cues indicate that the plans are part of a larger whole.
4.5 Implementation and Performance Measures

The Way We Grow and The Way We Move are strategic plans that set out policy direction. Separate implementation plans are being developed to outline the specific programs and initiatives that are needed to implement the plans’ policy direction. An important element of the implementation plan will be defining performance measures to gauge progress towards goal achievement. It is intended that these will be reported at a corporate level and related to the Strategic Goals outlined in The Way Ahead Strategic Plan. Regular reporting of progress towards Strategic Goals should be used to adjust the focus of programs in the Implementation plans.

5.0 APPLICATION OF PLANS

5.1 Transit and Land-Use Integrated Framework

Through the development of The Way We Grow and The Way We Move, Edmonton began seeking a means to more effectively integrate land-use and transportation, particularly given the emphasis to increase infrastructure investment in an expanded LRT network. The city initiated the development of a Transit and Land-Use Framework to guide the development of land around in relation to transit provision.

The concepts of Smart Growth and Transit Oriented Development have been prevalent across North America for a number of years. The application of these concepts in Edmonton looks to recognize the local Edmonton context and the reality that different parts of the city may require different approaches. These concepts will be most effective where the City has provided high standard transit. Areas of the city that are served by
or will be served by a high standard of transit should have higher development intensity. Conversely, those areas where transit investment will be less could be developed with lower densities. The diversity of the current development patterns and built forms indicate that the integration of transit with land use will vary throughout the city and be influenced by the local context.

Edmonton seeks to promote development expectations that vary by type of transit facility and surrounding context as indicated below.

### 5.1.1 Type of Transit Facility

#### LRT Stations

LRT stations can be broadly categorized by community context, including current and expected land use. By categorizing each station, it provides some certainty to both the community and developers regarding the expected intensity and land use around the station.

![Different expectations for different nodes](image)

**Figure 5.1 Transit Nodes**

**Central Area** – Downtown and the surrounding area is well established as a walkable, intensely developed area that tends to have a strong transit oriented market. This area will continue to develop at high densities with a wide variety of uses that encompass a rich spectrum of economic, social and cultural activities.

**Town Centre/Mixed Use Stations** – These station areas include a mix of residential and commercial communities that will develop in character over time.

**Employment Centre Stations** – These station areas can be employment-focused with a mixture of land uses.
**Residential Area Stations** – These stations located in predominantly residential areas, will generally be developed less intensively and should be developed sensitively to respect the existing or planned neighbourhoods.

**Other Key Transit Locations**

**Transit Centres** – Areas around transit centres benefit from their proximity to transit services and can develop to a moderate intensity.

**High Frequency Transit Corridors** – Linear corridors that are served by frequent core transit service are well situated to intensify to moderate levels of development as there can be significant synergies between such development and the adjoining transit corridor.

**Areas not Adjacent to Key Transit Nodes or Corridors**

Areas between the transit nodes and premium transit corridors will not have the same transit accessibility options as other areas and therefore should not intensify to the same extent as those served by premium transit.

**5.1.2 Corporate Approach to Community Building**

The integration of transportation and land use is more complex than simply placing the correct land uses around the appropriate transportation investments. It incorporates all the diverse elements of community-building that influence land use and transportation infrastructure and the overall urban fabric.

Figure 5.2 Integration of City Building Elements
**Land Use and Community Character** – The creation of a sustainable community involves a mix of land use and intensity of development, as well the elements of land use features and design that promote the development of walkable communities.

**Transportation Mobility and Access** – Transportation facilities should be designed for the movement of goods and people balanced by the need to design the transportation system to fit with the surrounding/desired land use context and support development opportunities.

**Parks, Public Spaces and Civic Infrastructure** – Parks and civic infrastructure are community investments that have a significant impact on adjoining land uses. A system that considers transit/transportation infrastructure to a greater extent than the current system will be necessary to develop liveable, transit-friendly communities. The frequency of use, public safety and public acceptance of parks, public spaces and civic infrastructure increases significantly when the access and visibility is improved.

**Economic Development and Development Incentives** – The City has the ability to provide incentives, encourage and potentially share risk with the private developers to create the community’s desired pattern of development. Economic development and development incentives play a critical role in shaping the pattern of development in Edmonton and placing demands on the transportation system.

**5.1.3 Transit Land-Use Framework - Guide**

In order to apply the concept of a Transit Land Use Framework, a guide is being developed to outline aspects of community development in relation to key transit facilities. The specifics of this guide have not yet been confirmed nor the mechanisms for its application. Of particular note for the encouragement of transit supportive land use is the proposal for minimum development densities near transit nodes, decreasing with distance from the node. Also suggested are maximum parking rates for land uses close to LRT stations. The suggestion of maximum building heights is included in order to encourage a sharing of density and development over a community rather than single stand-alone high density structures. Buildings higher than the maximum recommended height would be permitted in conjunction with the provision of additional amenities such as a larger public space or community facility. Many other aspects of community development are also identified in the Framework.

**5.2 Applying the Transit Land Use Framework**

During the development of the Transit Land-Use Framework, there have been occasions to test its application to real life situations. The difficulty comes, for the most part, in greenfield applications where LRT is planned but has not yet been constructed. While developers understand the concept of maximizing infrastructure investment by providing supportive development around the LRT, their immediate reality is a suburban
context and associated market demands. It is necessary to apply creativity and flexibility to each situation in order to move forward.

One application of the Framework was a planning exercise that was undertaken to lay out a land use concept for mixed use around a future LRT station, including a Park and Ride site. Consistent with the Framework, an initial suggestion was to include residential and office/commercial uses immediately adjacent to the station to maximize TOD around the station. The Park and Ride site was to be placed beyond these uses, about 200m away. This was not palatable in the near term as the sites are undeveloped but the Park and Ride has immediate demands. To address the immediate concern but plan for the future, the land use plan was revised to locate the Park and Ride site near the LRT station, but designate it as an interim use. The intent is to provide the opportunity over time to develop the Park and Ride sites as TOD when demand warrants. Drive aisle will be designed into the Park and Ride to reflect future streets so that there may be potential for TOD to occur incrementally. One important element in this strategy is to ensure that the transitional expectations are understood from the start so that Park and Ride users will be aware that parking may not be available in the future.

Another application of the Framework is a planning exercise to develop a town centre plan around a future LRT station. A key component of developing a town centre is the lay-out of the area with block sizes and near-grid street network such that the can transition and become increasingly urban over time.

At this suburban location, the developer has a desire to develop a suburban commercial site including big box retail. The site is between 200m-400m from the future station. While big box retail does not fit in with the principles outlined in the Transit Land-Use Framework, it will be included in the plan as part of negotiations with the developer to provide a town-centre. The site will be developed such that it can evolve over time to a more urban, town-centre type development. To do this, the large site will be designed to locate buildings on street-face with drive-aisles that align with the local streets in the town centre. As demand warrants, surface parking may transition to further development. The Town Centre plan is shown below in Figure 5.3
Further to the policy direction of The Way We Move, Edmonton is in the process of planning an aggressive city-wide LRT expansion program to all sectors of the city. Edmonton was the first city in North America to develop an LRT system. The original LRT line was developed along a former rail corridor with stations serving leisure facilities and residential areas along the line. It was developed with high floor vehicles, which was state-of-the-art technology at the time. The existing system relies heavily on bus transfers and park and ride. With the existing LRT line, transit-supportive development is encouraged, but results have been limited. This is influenced by the overall number of stations and the pace and context of development in an area next to a former rail line.
The City is developing an overall LRT network plan and recommending that future extensions of LRT be developed using a urban style approach to LRT. This would mean closer stop spacing using low-floor LRT vehicles in order to provide more direct service and access to more people and places. Moving towards an urban LRT system allows for easier integration within communities and provides a better fit with land use plans for transit-oriented development. This in turn would most effectively deliver the City’s land-use and transportation objectives.

Figure 5.4 LRT Network Plan
5.4 Bridging the Gap

While the LRT expansion is a high priority, it is recognized that construction of the system will take time and will be dependent on funding availability from various levels of government. As such, the City of Edmonton is looking to improve transit service in high demand corridors. The concept of providing a ‘pre-cursor’ to LRT will provide ‘premium’ bus service along these corridors that will support and lead into future provision of LRT.

Premium bus service would be characterized as an express service (with minimal number of stops) with frequencies comparable to that provided by LRT, connecting major destinations and transit interchange points. It is characterized by higher than average system speed and improved reliability. In order to achieve this type of service, the adoption of a wide range of bus priority measures is required to create transit priority corridors.

Service provision would be similar to Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). However, the City does not want to expend a significant investment on BRT when the ultimate plan is to construct LRT. Therefore, a package of measures such as queue jumps, signal priority and bus lanes will be used where significant changes to road network are not required.

It is also proposed that the City provide high standard, direct transit service to future LRT stations at the time of initial development in order to encourage transit oriented development. Developers are concerned that the guidelines of the Integrated Transit Land-Use Framework do not reflect market demand in advance of the LRT. Higher densities and restrictions to parking allowances are difficult to maintain without supporting transit to ensure their viability. By providing direct bus service in the early stages of community development, transit ridership is built up in advance of LRT and foundation for TOD can be encouraged.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Integrating transportation and land use starts with a vision for the city that clearly sets out the priorities and goals for the future city. In Edmonton, development of strategic level policy to bring the vision to reality requires that the administrative departments responsible for land use planning and transportation planning be aligned and integrated to ensure that city policies are complementary and supportive of ultimate city goals. Policies look to promote more compact, healthy and complete communities, with encouragement of more intense development around transit infrastructure investment. Transportation policies have a diminished focus on commuter traffic and greater emphasis on encouraging alternative modes of transportation as well as the efficient movement of goods. Application of policy requires strategies that look not only to ultimate goals, but include measures to allow for the transition and evolution of land use towards the ultimate goals.
Through the integration of the City’s land use and transportation strategic plans and the consistent application of those plans, the City of Edmonton will continue to provide leadership in sustainable transportation practices and create the compact, liveable, and sustainable city of the future that is envisioned.