

10 years' worth of
trillings

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Study group wants light rail transit plans derailed

By Gary Park
(Herald staff writer)

Light rail transit — the top-priced item in Calgary's list of 10-year transportation improvements — got a bumpy ride Thursday from a city council-appointed planning committee.

It was called wishful thinking, premature and a waste of \$116 million city planners said the first eight-mile leg from downtown to south Calgary will cost.

The severe criticism came from architects, developers and citizens on the city's planning advisory

committee during a five-hour review of long-range growth strategies now being debated at city hall.

Leading the attack, former city planner Jim Whitehead, who is Calgary land manager for Daon Development Corp., said LRT is an inflexible, fixed-rail system that is insulated to the travel habits of Calgarians.

"Trips in origin and destination are so spread out that it's a bit of wishful thinking to imagine that LRT can be a success," he said.

Even downtown would

need up to 200,000 people — five times current employment figures — before the system could be viable.

Mr. Whitehead conceded that an LRT line down the south corridor would be mandatory in time, but the city's goal of a start-up date in 1982 is premature.

"The Edmonton rapid transit system is a good test case," he said.

"City council should wait to see how it operates before making a tremendous capital investment that could result in large operating losses."

The money earmarked

for LRT could be spent more effectively on an advanced express bus system, operating in exclusive bus lanes and not competing with cars.

Calgary architect Paul Maas said the city's plan to build LRT through downtown and south on the CP Rail right-of-way to Anderson Road is questionable in view of projected costs.

"Why concentrate on the one line?" he asked.

"We should be planning a network of transit corridors for express buses and we should establish these corridors before the land is

too expensive to do the job."

Express buses have already established their potential in Calgary, but they won't attract people out of cars until they can operate on exclusive rights-of-way, Mr. Maas said.

Jim Holbecky, a Calgary developer, supported the idea of exclusive bus lanes to "make it as miserable as possible for people in cars to get downtown."

Along with this, he said people who insist on driving to downtown from peripheral areas should perhaps have to pay a fee for each trip.

"The benefits of single-family living should be available to those who are willing to pay for a fair share of services provided by the city," he said.

The committee, in recommending the kind of growth strategy city council should adopt for the next 20 years, favored mass transit lines to the northwest and south — but emphasized this does not have to be LRT.

In arriving at a consensus on a growth plan, the committee pulled ideas from most of the six basic alternatives city planners

will present at a public hearing before city council Feb. 21.

The alternatives are aimed at accommodating 127,000 people, leaving the other 181,000 planners forecast will be added to Calgary's population by 1996 to move into new development — areas already designated by city council.

Using this guideline, the committee recommended that up to 50,000 should be housed within the inner city and the rest distributed in the northwest, north, south and southeast sectors.

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