

Allowing secondary suites around rapid transit stations

Introduction

Council directed that Administration report back outlining the procedures and implications of allowing secondary suites in a radius around rapid transit stations. This attachment responds to that direction by providing some information on Calgary's rapid transit network, current and future land uses in their vicinities, and evaluating an approach to secondary suites in these areas.

Background

The Council direction refers to "rapid transit stations," which are the existing and future stations on the Rapid Transit Network identified in RouteAhead, a 30-Year Strategic Plan for Transit in Calgary, approved in 2013 March. Section 4 of RouteAhead identifies a network of light rail transit (LRT), bus-based transitways and bus rapid transit (BRT) that includes high-quality stations and offers a faster way to travel by transit. The Rapid Transit Network is a subset of the Primary Transit Network identified in the Municipal Development Plan (2009) and the Calgary Transportation Plan (2009) (MDP and CTP). The new infrastructure projects that make up the Rapid Transit Network are at various stages of implementation, as identified in the diagram below. Some are at early planning stages and others are under construction. Those that are in the early planning stages do not necessarily have defined station locations.

In the MDP and CTP, policies discussing the current and future transit system use the following terms: Transit Hubs, Transit Centres, and the Primary Transit Network. For the purpose of this report Administration determined which of these terms would represent "rapid transit stations" to identify the locations in the city where an approach to secondary suite implementation would be practical to evaluate.

The list below includes Rapid Transit stations in order of permanency and capacity. The degree of permanency of the infrastructure associated with these stations allows for longer range land use planning in their vicinity due to certainty of location, capacity and service levels.

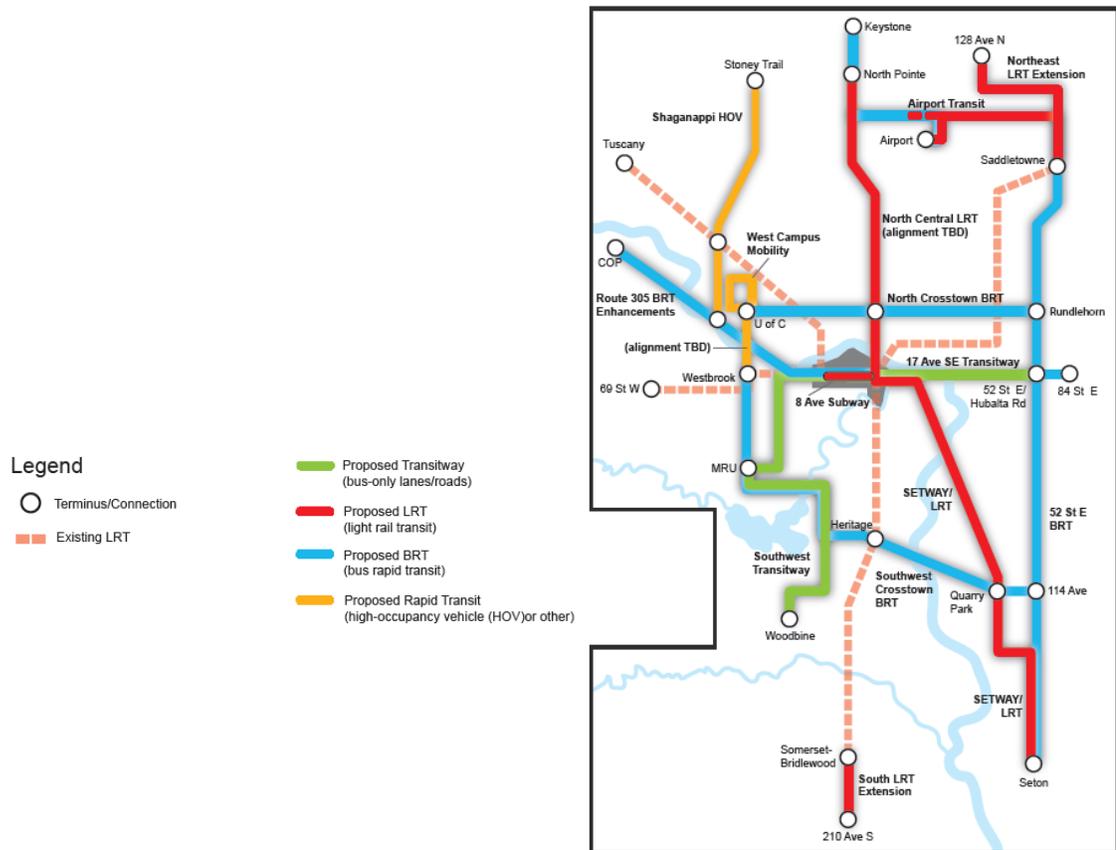
1. LRT stations
These stations require the greatest level of capital investment, provide the greatest service capacity, and are the most permanent.
2. Transitway stations
These stations provide LRT-type platforms for bus service and many will convert to LRT in the future. Therefore they are permanent, require significant capital investment, and enable high capacity service.
3. BRT stations
These stations require a greater degree of capital investment than a standard bus stop, and would be somewhat more permanent and provide somewhat greater service capacity than standard bus stops. They will generally be curbside stations located near major intersections offering connections with other bus/C-Train service.

The remaining types of stations and stops that would not be included in this evaluation are those bus and shuttle stops that are prevalent, simple in infrastructure, and do not meet the intent of Council's direction. Evaluating an approach to secondary suites in proximity to these types of stations would not be practical.

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A phased approach to the implementation of a policy allowing suites near rapid transit stations would address the various stages of implementation of the transit network. If Council requires this work, Administration suggests implementation priority in the following order:

1. Existing LRT stations. Policy work can proceed immediately.
2. Future LRT, transitway and BRT stations that Council has approved for funding. Policy work should await confirmation of station locations upon completion of detailed design.
3. Future LRT, transitway and BRT stations that Council has not approved for funding. No policy work should proceed at these stations.



City-Wide Policy

Several current city-wide policies address the transit network and residential development, including the MDP, the CTP, Transit Oriented Development Policy Guidelines (TOD) and Handbook, RouteAhead, various Area Redevelopment Plans (ARP), Area Structure Plans (ASP), Community Plans (CP), and Corridor Land Use Studies (LUS). Within these documents there is some alignment between future vision, land use, residential density, and the transit network.

Municipal Development Plan (MDP)

The MDP encourages a wide range of conventional and innovative housing choice by type, tenure (rental and ownership), density, affordability, and accessibility, to meet the range of household income, lifestyle, family types, and age groups within all communities of the city (section 2.3.1). This principle highlights the needs for complete communities, which support

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various activities and diverse demographics. The MDP is general in its description of where these types of housing and density should locate in the city, indicating the need for complete communities city-wide, defined not only by the range of housing choices and types listed above, but also uses, activities and amenities. Part 3 of the MDP discusses Activity Centres and Corridors, where land uses should be mixed, and residential densities increased. The highest densities and building heights should be located closest to transit stops and stations, stepping down with increased distance away.

Section 3.3 states that Activity Centres should encourage development with a mix of medium and higher density employment and residential uses. Activity Centres, defined as Major (MAC), Community (CAC), and Neighbourhood (NAC) have minimum thresholds for jobs and population per gross developable hectare, which highlights the need to have higher densities in areas with greater access to amenities, including transit.

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

The TOD Policy Guidelines apply to an approximate 600 metre radius (5-10 minute walk) around LRT stations, with some flexibility based on the local context. The intention of TOD is to guide development in proximity to stations with emphasis for uses other than parking (both parking lots and uses with a high degree of required parking) that promote ridership via walking. The outcome would be to convert some of the auto trips to the station to pedestrian, cycle, or bus trips through improvements to bus service and cycle/pedestrian connections. Station area planning requires community involvement to create a plan that is appropriate for the station and community context, while balancing policy goals to create density in appropriate locations.

TOD policies call for medium to high density residential uses in proximity to stations with a vertical and horizontal mix of land uses. Section 4.3 of the policies suggests limiting low density residential forms, such as single family detached on standard or large lots. These uses; however, may be acceptable on the outer edge of the 600 metre radius, dependent on the context.

Summary of Policy

The policies in both the MDP and the TOD Policy Guidelines to provide for medium to high densities in proximity to transit stations somewhat contravenes the approach of encouraging secondary suites broadly within these locations because suites do not count towards density calculations within the Land Use Bylaw (LUB) 1P2007.

When considering the implementation of density, there is a distinction between new and established communities. New communities should be planning for appropriate medium to high density residential land uses in proximity to future stations, thereby meeting MDP and TOD policies. On the other hand, established areas may have contextual rationale to reduce the 600 metre radius, which may in turn support the retention of existing single family homes in these areas. In these cases, suites would likely be a more viable option for broad implementation.

Procedures

Land Use and Local Area Planning

Land use in the vicinity of rapid transit stations varies, depending on the location and age of the surrounding community. Newer greenfield communities have land use near major transit stations that most often respects the current MDP density targets and TOD guidelines for medium to high density residential and employment numbers. While these land use districts currently list suites as an allowable use, they are only allowed within single detached dwellings,

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which are unlikely to develop under multi-residential land use designations since they may not be the highest and best use of the land.

In established areas, land uses in the vicinity of transit stations may reflect the historical land use designations of low density residential, where many single detached, semi-detached and other low density forms of housing would still exist. Low density and multi-residential land use districts, other than R-1, R-C1 and R-C1L, currently allow for suites within single detached dwellings. If parcels near transit stations have already been “up-zoned” as part of a TOD implementation process, which is the case in some communities, the opportunity for suites in single-detached dwellings may already be in place. However single detached dwellings on a parcel designated as R-1, R-C1, or R-C1L would require a Land Use amendment to allow for the opportunity for suites.

Development in vicinity to transit stations is often guided by local area plans in addition to the MDP. As noted, in new areas of the city, local area plans are consistent with the current TOD guidelines and MDP policies and the land uses in the vicinity of transit stations reflect the desired form and density of housing. In contrast, local area plans in established areas often have been in place for many years and could need updating to reflect new policies of city growth and development.

In Calgary, planning exercises to update local area plans in the vicinity of rapid transit have been undertaken using a thorough and lengthy engagement with the local community. There are station area plans that have been completed, are underway, or are being initiated in several communities with LRT stations. There is merit in this process and benefits to both Administration and the unique local communities, therefore, this approach to station area planning should continue. Any resulting policies that describe appropriate forms of development in these areas would likely consider the level of support for suites in local areas.

Area Redevelopment and Municipal Experience

Allowing secondary suites is one way of encouraging the retention of existing housing stock because a suite most likely increases the value of the home through upgrades and investment. In addition, suites can act as a mortgage helper for people who wish to locate within established communities where housing prices may be higher than developing areas. However the increased investment and value of the home creates some risk that suite implementation in the vicinity of rapid transit stations may discourage parcels with single detached dwellings from redeveloping into forms of higher residential density.

Further research into other municipalities that have more lengthy experience with suite implementation would contribute to Administration’s ability to evaluate this risk for the Calgary context. In addition, research that examines the value that a suite may add to a single detached home, in comparison to other home improvements, and how it may influence the likelihood of redevelopment would also be beneficial. Should Council wish to further contemplate suites in proximity to rapid transit stations, further work in this regard would be recommended.

Implications

Encouraging secondary suites in rapid transit station areas

The consideration of secondary suites within 600 metres of rapid transit stations would be an incremental approach to implementing suites in Calgary. Administration has consistently advocated for a city-wide and policy-based approach to suites, while also supporting proposed land use bylaw changes in four central wards earlier this year. Considering suites only in close

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proximity to transit stations may not achieve the goals of the current MDP policies and TOD guidelines. Incentivizing suites in these areas by only allowing them within small radii of transit stations would in effect encourage the retention of low density housing forms, contrary to the policies which support a transition to medium and high density residential and employment uses in these areas. These higher density housing forms are the type of development that decision-makers should support in these areas.

In addition, these areas with a greater intensity of suites would potentially overburden a small area. Without consultation, these communities may feel that they are shouldering an unfair share of residential intensification. There is merit in providing housing and tenure variety for a range of household types in proximity to transit, in order to conveniently locate as many transit users as possible. Incentivizing suites solely in these small areas may not achieve that goal in the same manner that medium to higher density housing forms could.

Conclusion

Administration continues to support a city-wide, policy-based approach to secondary suites, rather than an incremental or purely area-specific approach. A city-wide approach would support housing diversity in all communities to provide options for all demographics. Current MDP policies and the TOD guidelines support an increase in residential density and employment opportunities around activity centres, especially near transit stations. An incremental suites approach such as this would arguably incentivize the retention of single detached dwelling stock rather than promote intensification near rapid transit stations, especially in the established communities. This is likely to have only a limited effect on the goal of increasing housing choice in all communities.