

Background and Previous Council Direction

Background

The Calgary Transit Free Fare Zone is a legacy service that was introduced in 1981 as a pilot project to encourage early adoption of the new CTrain service. This initiative was grounded in the 1966 Downtown Master Plan, which envisioned a comprehensive urban design featuring a ring of highways, parkades surrounding the downtown core, a pedestrian mall, and rapid transit connections converging on 7th Avenue South. The Free Fare Zone also followed a successful pilot of the “bonus bus”, a free downtown bus shuttle service launched in 1979 to encourage Calgarians to use transit downtown.

Over the past several decades, Calgary Transit’s system, operating environment, and customer base have grown and evolved significantly. On multiple occasions, Council has considered changes to the Free Fare Zone, including potential expansions of the zone to adjacent CTrain stations. Ultimately, these previous motions have not passed and the Free Fare Zone remains unchanged since it was launched 45 years ago.

Previous Council Direction

DATE	REPORT NUMBER	DIRECTION/DESCRIPTION
2026 February 24	EC2026-0106	<p>Council directed Administration to undertake a comprehensive review of the Free Fare Zone and report back to Council by Q2 2026.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare a detailed report and analysis 2. Engage with the public, City partners, and interested parties 3. Engage transit users 4. Measure the financial impacts 5. Present viable alternatives to the existing Free Fare Zone 6. Assess potential enhancements or value-added elements
2011 July 4	LPT2011-61	<p>Analysis of extending the Free Fare Zone to Stampede / Victoria Park station to support conferences, meetings and tradeshow was received for information.</p> <p>Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Received this report for information; and 2. Directed Administration to provide an update to the SPC on Land Use, Planning and Transportation, no later than 2011 December on a comprehensive Tourism Transit Strategy, incorporating Smart Card Technology.
2011 May 16	LPT2011-34	<p>Council approved a deferral of report LPT2011-34 to the 2011 June 15 SPC on Land Use, Planning and Transportation.</p>
2011 February 7	NM2011-06	<p>On 2011 February 7, Council considered Notice of Motion NM2011-06 Extending the LRT Free Fare Zone to Increase the City of Calgary's Competitiveness in Attracting National and International Conventions and Tradeshow.</p> <p>Council referred the motion to Administration for additional consultation and evaluation of the economic benefits to The City and impact on Transit's annual operating budget and service levels for a report to the 2011 April 20 meeting of the SPC on Land Use, Planning and Transportation.</p>