

OPINION

Strange priorities rule C-Train decisions

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

We have written many times in this space about the need for more investment into Calgary's transit system.

Our comparisons have been with the great cities of the world, including discussions about international ratings by services such as Mercer Consulting and the Economist Intelligence Unit.

From our perspective, Calgary needs to look internationally for benchmarking because the North American model is mired in the dominance of freeway and sprawl patterns of growth.

There are some exceptions, such as Portland, Ore., and New York, but most North American cities have developed at such low densities, and with such a focus on road building, that travelling by public transit is downright inconvenient.

So with all of our cries for more

transit, one might think that we would be thrilled about the recent push to extend Calgary's C-Train to the west.

Expanding the C-Train is a must-do, but why are we going west? Quite simply, the big question is where does it go?

An effective transit network is not single purpose, bringing people from the outskirts into the core.

To be an effective transit system, there should be demand in both directions at all times, which means linking major employment districts at multiple points throughout the full network.

While the three current legs of the C-Train converge on Calgary's largest employment district, the downtown core, each leg also connects to other significant employment areas.

For instance, the northwest leg connects to Calgary's second largest employer, the University of Calgary, along with stops at McMahon Stadium, SAIT and the Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD), and is reasonably close to the Foothills Medical Centre.

In addition to the employment connection, the northwest LRT also provides convenient transit for the tens of thousands of students who daily attend U of C, SAIT, and ACAD.

The northeast leg connects the Westwinds Business Park, the Peter Lougheed Hospital Centre, and numerous shopping centres that function as employment areas along 36th Street.

The south leg connects the thriving south business parks in Midnapore and Sundance, adjacent to MacLeod Trail, and stops at the Saddledome and Stampede entertainment/cultural/convention district.

It is also important to note that the C-Train, in every direction, also includes missed opportunities and unfulfilled promise.

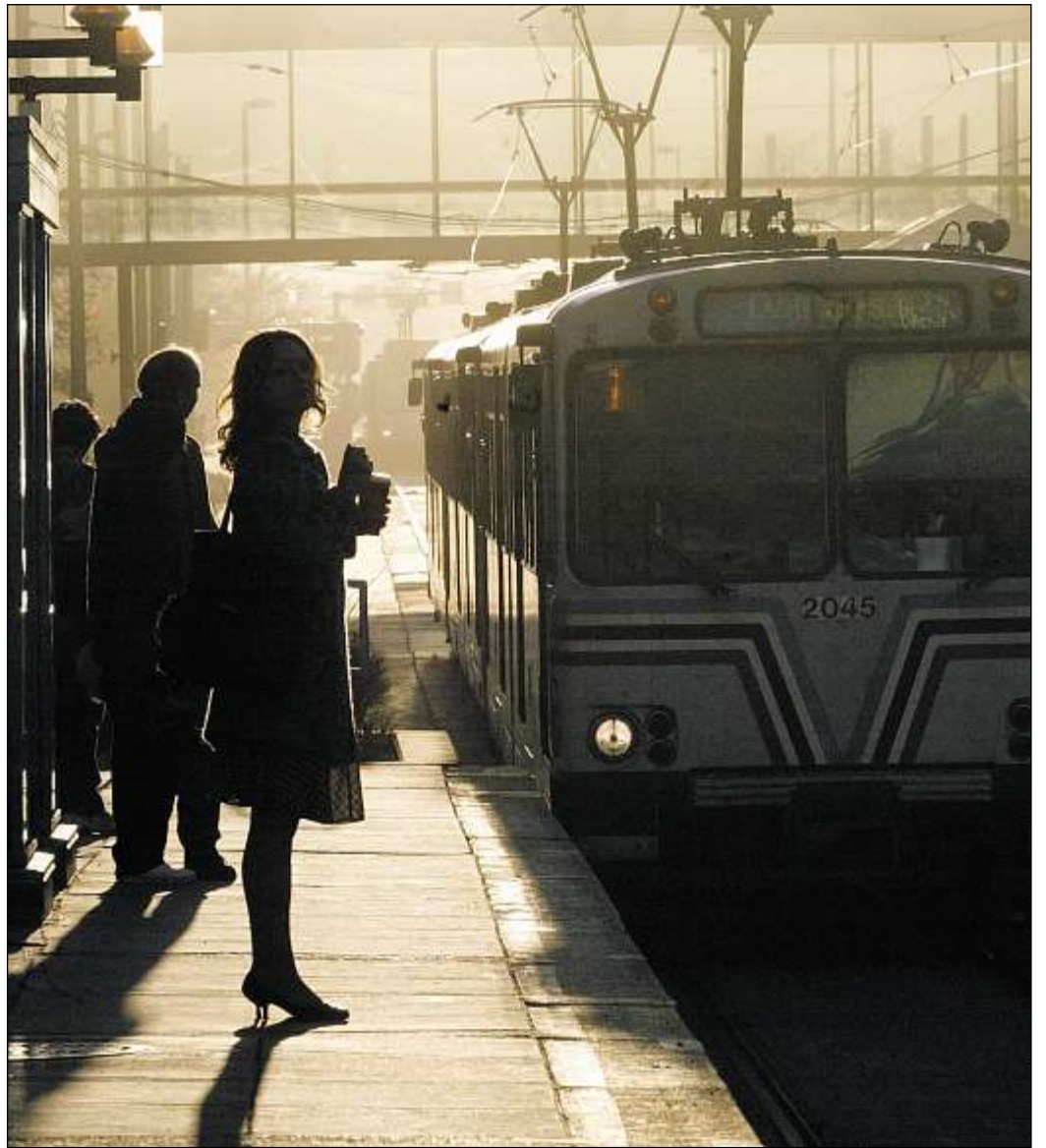
For example, the northwest leg of the C-Train was intended to serve a high density commercial hub at Crowfoot Centre.



Bev Sandalack



Jim Dewald



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Morning commuters wait for the C-Train to arrive at the Olympic Plaza Station.

However, the area was developed instead as a confusing collection of big-box stores and parking lots.

Similarly, the south leg, developed after the Crowfoot mistake should have been noted, was intended to feed employment in Shawnessy Towne Centre.

However, political pressure allowed this prime real estate to be under-developed to sprawling big-box retail development instead.

In both of these cases, potentially vibrant

mini-downtown visions were replaced with acres of paved parking lots (as songwriter Joni Mitchell would say, we paved paradise).

The opportunities for redevelopment of these areas will be left for a future article, but what we want to focus on here is determining the most effective route for future extensions.

The options for ongoing extensions are north centre, southeast, and west.

SEE PRIORITIES, PAGE I9

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