

## Regional Transit? Not Such a Good Deal.

Many will know that City Council is being asked to upload our Edmonton Transit Service into a regional system that would be responsible to provide service to the whole of the Edmonton Metro area. During September, information will be provided to City Council and a decision must be made as to whether Edmonton will participate in Phase 1 of the initiative. Regional transit is a great idea. Regionalized transit's time has come and it's appropriate that duplications of efforts and costs are eliminated. No question.

But, there are a few hiccups in the current scheme. Here's a brief list for you to consider:

1. It won't apply to the whole region. The second largest partner, Strathcona County, has opted out, along with their millions of dollars of budget share. Their Council decided that the regional system they have works perfectly well and there was no need to fund an additional entity when everything is working fine as it is.
2. We already have a regional system that includes all partners. Buses come and go from and to all regional municipalities that would be served by the "Regional System" PLUS Strathcona County. The Regional Fare initiative is nearing the end of its trial and will be implemented shortly. It's the best in Canada.
3. There are added costs to this initiative. Originally proponents were predicting efficiencies. Not anymore. In fact, they're asking municipalities to pay twice by funding an operating Line of Credit AND directly funding their payroll. They promised it would cost LESS, not MORE. The demand for more and more money will never end, AND...
4. Municipalities will give up direct control of their systems to Regional without direct oversight. Council will be expected to just pay the bill and will have no direct say into where service is provided. Unless, of course, they want to pay more.
5. Coupled with the loss of control will be a continued liability as the municipalities will still be on the hook when things go wrong. It's a "pay-the-bill-then-pay-for-our-mistakes" system.
6. ETS may not be perfect, but it IS a great system. Much effort and resources are expended to deliver a world class transit system. This initiative will simply add another layer of bureaucracy to an already complex system.
7. There's only so much City budget to go around. If we fund this fatally flawed plan, what other valuable and viable initiatives will lose out, when we already have a great transit system?
8. Council is being asked to approve phase 1 of the plot, but no information on Phase 2 is provided. What are they hiding? When we've already sunk huge resources into Phase 1, Phase 2 can come along with problems we never dreamed of.
9. Of concern, the folks at regional keep missing agreed-to information deadlines. If they're unable to keep these simple promises, how can we expect them to run a complex transit system?

10. Service hours will be uploaded to Regional and dumped into a bucket, then re-distributed by Regional. Will ETS riders give up service hours to provide more service to regional municipalities? Already, Regional has indicated they will place bus stops further apart. What other service reductions can we expect?

Regional CEO Paul Jankowsky, when asked what his vision for an operating model is, replied "It's too soon to tell." But they plan to put some service on the road next year. And they don't know what their service model is.

When promoting the scheme, St. Albert City Councilor Wes Brodhead, Chair of the Commission, said "We're going to save you some money!" No one is saying that anymore, as the bills keep piling up and municipalities keep getting asked for more.

It's time some other municipalities, notably Edmonton, took a good look at Strathcona County's rationale for pulling out and take a good look at Mayor Sohi's concerns. Or maybe there should be a good hard look at where all the money is being spent. Or maybe the whole thing should be recognized for the stinkeroo it is and municipalities should take their money and run. Just sayin'.

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