

**Speaking Notes – Mayor Stephen Mandel  
West Edmonton Business Association  
Annual Luncheon Meeting - April 29, 2008  
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Thank you for that kind introduction and for inviting me to speak to you again this year.

I've had to adjust my speech openings for the last week to make sure I was reflecting the weather – now I think - I hope - I'm safe with the spring message.

I'm only hoping I don't jinx it.

I know this is an organization that has grown out of a shared response to issues in the west end of our city, and I know you tend to concentrate on business issues –

but today I'm going to talk mostly about LRT - and why I think it's of fundamental importance for our West end, for businesses and communities - just as it is for our entire city.

Years ago our ability to expand seemed limitless. Everyone could have a piece of land. Subdivisions were springing up as fast as developers could imagine them and services were generally keeping pace. At the time, no one thought it matter how far out we stretched.

We have all benefited from this type of growth – it's meant neighbourhoods have grown and businesses have found opportunity meeting the needs of the thousands of families that have made these areas home.

And we have a thriving west end, anchored by the world's biggest and most incredible shopping and entertainment centre, with a busy commercial and industrial sector and neighbourhoods and communities that are well established parts of our whole.

But now, when we think about growth we think differently.

Planning for growth shapes everything that's happening these days at City Hall – and some new themes are emerging that will change things.

First, a report prepared by Doug Radke, stated that the Edmonton region must all learn to work together – including how it plans for growth. His report projects we will have a population of 1.9 million by 2041. That's only about 30 years away.

And we all know that doubling our population cannot mean we double our footprint. We already have the second largest footprint of any municipality in the country – this is one measure we need to start to lose.

So how do we plan for 900,000 new residents of this region?

We start by looking inward – including from the west end - toward downtown.

We consider major new high density developments – like we are seeing take shape in Strathern or Century Park and we see a lot more of the high density urban villages taking shape across our city.

The idea of density won't shock our west end – these neighbourhoods have already been built with a higher density requirement than what we see in most core neighbourhoods – but even here our expectations have to grow.

Our city, if it wants transit, has to determine where the hub should go. To me the only location is downtown.

There are many reasons as to why downtown – but two most important are cost and efficiency. They must be the fundamental drivers. We cannot build an LRT system with hubs everywhere or it will be unattainable.

If we assume that success will be reached we must go thru downtown and we must plan and build a city that links to and from the downtown core.

The planning has to support a vision of our core as a centre of work, play, entertainment, living and education – and all of our plans at our edges need to link to and support his vision.

Cities that are vibrant have lively downtown cores with businesses, residential areas, theatres, concert halls, art galleries, restaurants, parks, schools and most importantly, people.

Cities that are sustainable build toward the centre – in terms of transit lines and access – everything points towards the core.

That isn't to say that everything has to happen downtown – or the West end has to be prepared to give something up - far from it.

Vibrant cities also have vibrant neighbourhoods, thriving urban villages, alternate main streets, and neighbourhoods that are shopping, working and living destinations.

It's so easy to see where this could build in the west end, along retail streets like Stony Plain Road.

And today vibrant cities rely more and more on transit. Transit becomes a major way for people to get to work, to shop to visit friends, to access the core and get back again.

Edmonton is planning a major transit overhaul over the next 30 years. Our existing plan calls for more than \$7 billion in investment and I applaud this plan and it's potential. However, the enormous cost must be born by more than the City of Edmonton.

If it works it will link our region and provide clean, sustainable transportation arteries for a region of 2 million people.

It will lessen the strain on our major roadways.

It will reduce our carbon footprint.

It will be cost effective because we will find a better balance between roads and transit, and it will provide an efficient city-wide access at a time when everyone with a crystal ball seems to see signs for gasoline at \$2.20/litre and we know that the days where the costs of navigating traffic will start to be too much for many.

With all of these benefits, and all of these big dreams and all of the money we are getting ready to spend..... I am amazed that we don't seem to have a clear view of what LRT is supposed to actually do.

We are being asked to make LRT the major capital spending item for the next 30 years – and let me be clear, I agree it should be – but we must get the vision right.

I know I find it frustrating, I can only imagine how many of our citizens feel.

I don't know how many of you have spent time in Toronto. There's not much I envy about our eastern neighbour, but I do envy its subway.

Not just because they got their lines all built when it was so much more cost-effective to do so – but because they understand – really understand – what transit is supposed to do.

Effective transit systems pick up passengers all along the way.

And there are clusters of development at each stop with businesses that support the people living there.

In cities like Toronto, Montreal and increasingly Vancouver, you can live, work, shop, visit and live along a subway line and not even feel the need for a car.

In fact, by the time you find and pay for parking at most destinations you often feel foolish for having bothered.

And because people who rely on transit want to live near transit – high and medium density development and commercial activity sprouts up along the entire route.

And smart cities plan transit at the same time they plan neighbourhoods – they appreciate that as much as transit is a transportation tool, it also enables community growth – for people, housing, development, commerce – always gravitate towards transportation lines. It's a community development tool.

You can see it all around the world - if you were to look at them as satellite images on Google Earth ... you would see where development tracks transit.

This pattern of development isn't new – this isn't a brave new idea – the only real mystery here is why Edmonton has yet to get it right.

Why we haven't learned what transit oriented development is all about.

Because it seems to me that our city administration is at odds with a real transit oriented development plan – the current plans for the west route of the LRT show this is so.

It seems to me that there are at least 3 competing visions at play.

1) The first option imagines that LRT is just a really expensive express bus route – it leaves West Edmonton Mall – a major destination point – and runs virtually as an express bus route all

the way to the University – another destination point - along an entire 87 avenue path that has very little high density existing or potential along the way – or at either end for that matter.

It turns our university into the transit hub for our entire city and by doing so it works against our downtown plan by pushing people and development away from our core.

It creates a major parking challenge at the university and the mall – because this is not a transit route that people will walk to. It necessitates that more buses and people and cars converge at the university – where frankly we can't afford to escalate traffic levels and it places more pressure on 114 street, already one of the most congested streets in our city.

And remember, this is not a line that people will walk to catch, they will drive to one end or the other and expect to be able to leave their cars at the new parking lots we will have to build.

It's 56 blocks that can't be made into transit oriented development.

Its sole advantage is in having a high destination stop at either end – so if the goal is to have LRT just be a high speed commuter train – with no stops in between - then this is the way to go.

2) The second option is build LRT south from the mall – along the Quenell bridge and Whitemud.

It seems logical – if you assume the train must cross the river – to build a bridge crossing where we're already spending to widen and fix a bridge.

But this route implies that LRT should circumnavigate the city – similar to the Anthony Henday – and have a hub at Neil Crawford.

And again, this route does nothing in terms of having LRT collect people along the way – it's another express route. And it presupposes that the planning that has pushed so much of our city toward the suburbs – and towards having the second lowest density of any city in the country – is the way we should continue to grow.

Again it pushes people away from downtown – away from our core and it builds a system people will have to drive to.

There are cheaper, better options to move people from the Southwest towards Neil Crawford - LRT doesn't work best here.

- 3) Or finally there is an option that actually supports a view of a city that is focused on strengthening its core and linking people from across the city to the core.

If we again assume the line starts at West Edmonton Mall, it then quickly moves towards Stony Plain Road and towards downtown.

There are options for the route – whether it would be right on Stony Plain Road or along 100 Avenue – it moves principally across an area that is already high and medium density, that has commercial development and that is craving urban renewal.

It heads towards the core – the centre of our city and helps to plan for a future region – the one with 900,000 more people – that will have to grow inwards.

It supports the view that downtown becomes the hub of a region of 2 million people – rather than continuing to promote development along our periphery – with an integrated system that extends into the west end, north through Castledowns and into St. Albert, northeast into the industrial heartland and into Fort Saskatchewan and south towards the airport and branching into Millwoods and ultimately into Sherwood Park.

There are open houses taking place right now on the proposed extension of the LRT to the west end and I have to say that I have never been less impressed with the intransigence of members of our administration who talk about transit oriented development, and then work to deliver a plan that will amount to the opposite.

We have to be strategic and bold as we decide where the LRT development can and should go.

We have to appreciate the role it should play as a planning and community development tool, in linking communities, enabling the revival of areas like Stony Plain Road and in ensuring we build a more compact city.

The LRT is a tool for our future – it will make the difference in terms of how business and people in the west end link with the city as a whole.

But we have to decide to use it to do the right things. Because at \$100 million per kilometre (above ground) it isn't a tool we can make mistakes with.

You know where I'm heading. Option three - along Stony Plain Road gets us the most bang for the buck- it's the only option that creates true transit oriented development.

The LRT will eventually head west – no question.

The LRT will move people – no question – from the west end, but what happens in between is still to be decided.

LRT can't be an express service between 170 Street and 114 Street. It has to move people along the way – all the way, between the west and the core.

And it's not about choosing the best park and ride option. It can only work if we finally start to build a leave the car at home, big city, public transit option.

It's time we start thinking about Edmonton as a big city because it is.... if one million people already qualifies us, then think about our next million.

Edmonton is changing and we have to build solutions that best accommodate change – and we have to finally change our thinking as well.

We have to make some big decisions. We have to be bold. And we have to start now to make sure that 1.9 million people in 2041 thank us for being smart about the development that paved the way for a liveable, vibrant, exciting, northern city.

I know from your agenda that there is time now for some questions. I'm hoping I've said enough to get an interesting discussion going because when it comes to shaping our future, we all have a stake.

Thank you.