

**MAYOR IVESON KEYNOTE ADDRESS
VISION ZERO CONFERENCE
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Theme: How our urban shift intersects with Vision Zero

Thank you for the invitation to share a few thoughts with you today.

As a parent of two young children, and a road user just like you, traffic safety is an issue that's near and dear to my heart.

I'm proud of our City's work to dramatically reduce injuries and collisions by 55% over the last decade. I'm also proud of the fact that Edmonton was the first city in Canada to sign onto Vision Zero, which showed a firm commitment by City Council, led by Councillors Loken and Esslinger - and the City of Edmonton - to the health and wellbeing of our residents.

Now that this work is well underway, I want to connect some of the dots on how Vision Zero aligns with Edmonton's urban shift and the priority we are placing on increasing density in our communities... designing a better transit service... and building more pedestrian-friendly streets.

My conclusion to date is that the City's Vision Zero efforts must do a better – and more intentional job – of intersecting with our city building agenda.

The conversation we are having in this room today is the same conversation that's playing out in other cities across North America.

There is a shift happening, a movement away from a planning and engineering culture that was dominated by the automobile for the last half a century.

In Edmonton, this shift is playing out in a variety of ways and in a number of venues - whether it's at a public information session on re-imagining Jasper Avenue... or in frustrated social media commentary, often deserved, regarding blocked sidewalks and crosswalk safety.

As the conversation unfolds, there is a kind of tension developing between two schools of thought that, on the surface, seem

opposed to one another: car culture and pedestrian culture. But from my perspective, this isn't an either/or debate.

If you've spent any time around Edmonton, you'll see we're in the midst of a remarkable transformation - our downtown is changing as new towers are added to the horizon and we're seeing more and more people living and playing downtown than ever before.

We've learned that building a big city that is a great place to live, move, do business and connect with each other as a community - is larger than any one project... bigger than a new bridge and even larger than an NHL arena.

In fact, we know that building a big city -- still one of the fastest growing in the country -- means meshing together of a number of interconnected elements and policies.

For Edmonton, this has involved significant changes to our planning bylaws that encourage higher density development in our mature neighbourhoods. City-building includes things like lot-splitting, reducing parking requirements and allowing more basement, garage and garden suites across the city.

Since we initially allowed opportunities for suites we've seen growth from a few hundred legal suites to over three thousand. While our infill numbers rise and fall with market demand, we're seeing more and more development in our core neighbourhoods - including more than 5,000 new units in the last five years. And these numbers will continue to rise as new infill policies come into effect.

This infill work has also turned our attention to our so-called 'nodes and corridors' - the places that already have, for many decades, been the spaces we meet.

Many of these corridors were established along streetcar lines as 'high streets'. Today, even though the buildings and the streetcars have come and gone, the systems and patterns - the very DNA of our city - allow the city to continually rejuvenate itself.

These nodes and corridors are our next growth areas and they'll become increasingly important in the future as our city targets its efforts in areas that are most ripe for density - and for creating walkable, pedestrian-friendly communities that get people out of

their cars and outside, meeting friends and neighbours, and supporting local businesses.

In parallel with this, Edmonton's City Council has initiated a significant bus system review that will evolve our thinking about how we deliver better bus service to Edmontonians – and give them a service that more of us will actually want to use. My hope is that this review moves us to a 'main line' model of transit offering frequent, more direct service, thus giving many more Edmontonians options to leave their cars at home.

So what does this all mean for Vision Zero?

While Edmonton was the first city in Canada to sign onto Vision Zero, we did so at a time when our city was in the early stages of this urban shift I've been describing.

And like it or not, Vision Zero has exposed not just the opportunities, but the challenges that we need to focus on next.

Because, if our urban shift comes to fruition, we'll have more people out and about, using transit, riding their bikes to work, walking to the grocery store and living more active, engaged lives.

Which leads me to my next point: that is, our noble attempt to 'balance' the needs of all of our roadway users -- including cars, buses, trucks, bikes and pedestrians -- that balance hasn't always worked.

In fact, I've come to believe that 'balance' is an unhelpful concept that we should reconsider entirely.

Here's why.

We need to start at the very beginning by recognizing that some users are more vulnerable than others, and the more we draw people out into our streets and public spaces, the more we need to do to ensure they have a safe and inviting experience.

This means providing better infrastructure for cyclists, including separated bike lanes that give people the safety and the confidence to choose cycling as a viable transportation option.

It means getting serious about better urban design that may well involve widening our sidewalks, narrowing our lanes of traffic in key pedestrian areas and improving intersection design for the benefit of those who aren't protected by airbags and a steel cage.

It may also involve lowering speed limits in more areas where we know pedestrians will be clustered, and increasing the crossing times to allow seniors and those with mobility challenges to cross safely.

The bottom line is that this will inevitably mean changing the emphasis our planners, engineers and civic leaders put on *people*, and 'de-balancing' our approach, re-prioritizing people who walk and cycle on our streets.

One of the first things I noticed when I joined Edmonton City Council in 2007 was the disconnect between the planning, design and construction functions in our city.

We had transportation planners and urban planners not only working in separate buildings, but rarely talking together about what a better city should look and function like.

As a result, we had a transit system that was operations-heavy and didn't put enough emphasis on riders. We designed roadways to move cars – but pedestrians and cyclists were off the radar almost entirely.

Thanks to a some changes in policy, structure and personnel, our big city is recognizing that the Edmonton of tomorrow isn't the Edmonton of 1950.

And we're just now getting serious about building complete streets, which are *streets for people*.

So what do we as elected leaders need to do next? I've heard it said that if you want to know what really matters to leaders, don't look at their plans and visions - look at the budget. This is such a great point.

If we really want our urban shift to be fully realized, Council has to create the conditions within our budgets for this to happen. We can't talk about re-wiring our bus system without recognizing that bus riders begin and end their journey as pedestrians.

We can't simply *will* people to live healthier lives. We have to build the paths, sidewalks and trail connections that make healthy living an easy choice. And all of this requires putting our money where our mouth is.

I applaud the Vision Zero approach of looking at the five E's: Engineering, Enforcement, Education, Evaluation, and Engagement. I would add a sixth E, if we're really going to be serious about this: Execute.

From my perspective, auditing more intersections and crosswalks around Edmonton to determine which ones urgently need improvement is critical, but we have to make the money available to follow through on the work. My Council colleagues Dave Loken and Bev Esslinger have been pushing hard to improve the safety around schools by reducing speed limits in these areas, and have

brought intersection safety to the foreground. I also applaud my City Councillor Bryan Anderson for asking whether more money generated from photo enforcement can be directly applied to intersection safety improvements. It speaks to a call we've heard over and over from our citizens - that they want to see a more direct line between the money we collect through enforcement and the projects this revenue gets spent on. We need to demonstrate value in meaningful, transparent ways - and one way to do this is by improving the quality and safety of the sidewalks, intersections and pedestrian corridors we use every day.

Now, this isn't to say we stop investing in roads while we focus on pedestrian infrastructure. Like I said, it is not an either/or proposition.

The point we need to be clear on is that different roads serve different purposes. This is why we pushed so hard for upgrades to Yellowhead Trail: so that goods and services flow smoothly and efficiently through Edmonton – and make it safer for the drivers who have to use this key route every day.

Since I took office as Mayor in 2013, our City Council spent an additional \$55 million to dramatically improve the quality of our arterial roads. We invested in renewal rather than deferring this responsibility, as we sometimes did in the past.

These kinds of significant investments have improved the commuter experience for Edmontonians and have also contributed to a safer, more secure and efficient trip for drivers.

Indeed, if our goal is *people-centred planning*, a smoother, safer commute not only means we get home in one piece, it means we get home happier. At the same time, if your elected leaders make the right kinds of investments in transit infrastructure, you might choose a faster, more predictable ride on a train or a bus and spend some money at a local cafe, grocery store on your walk home from the transit stop.

So as we reflect back on the current and future successes of Vision Zero in Edmonton, it's time to look at those 5 E's and be honest about where we're strong, where we're weak, and what we can do to build the kind of *streets that serve people* – particularly our most vulnerable road users.

Vision Zero must reflect not only where our city is *today* but where *it's going*. I'm going to continue pushing for its focus on making tangible and transparent investments in the kinds of changes that benefit pedestrians and cyclists of all ages, because they're the ones who need our attention the most.

Expectations have never been higher from our citizens to build a city that they're proud to call home. We are only just realizing the potential for Edmonton to reach past its status as Canada's most underestimated city, as I've often called it. By fully embracing the mission of Vision Zero, and tying it to the changes we're making to build a more dense, urban environment, we can rise to show what city building means in the 21st Century.

Thank you.